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# **FEMINIST ISSUES IN EDUCATION:**

## **DEVELOPING A THEORY OF CLASS AND GENDER RELATIONS**

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
(by publication)

October 1989

Centre for Sociology and Social Research  
School of Education

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1. 'Socio-cultural reproduction and women's education' in Schooling for Women's Work, edited by R. Deem, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980, pp 13-25.
2. 'Cultural reproduction: the pedagogy of sexuality', Screen Education, No 32/33 1979, pp 141-153.
3. 'Schooling and the reproduction of class and gender relations' in Schooling, Ideology and the Curriculum, edited by L. Barton, R. Meighan and S. Walker, Falmer Press, 1981, pp 29-49.
4. 'Cultural and Political Economy: dual perspectives in the sociology of women's education', Educational Analysis, 3, 1, 1981, pp 97-116.

##### PART 2: CONSTRUCTING A FEMINIST THEORY OF GENDER

5. 'Male hegemony, social class and women's education' Journal of Education, vol 164, 1983, pp 141-153.
6. 'A feminist perspective on the relationship between family life and school life', Journal of Education, vol 166, no.1, 1984, pp 5-24.
7. 'A cloud over co-education'; an analysis of the forms of transmission of class and gender relations' in Gender, Class and Education, edited by S. Walker and L. Barton, Falmer Press, 1983, pp 69-91.
8. 'How shall we educate our sons?' in Co-education Reconsidered, edited by R. Deem, Open University Press, 1983, pp 69-91.

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10. 'Political lip-service or radical reform? Central government responses to issues of sex equality in education' in Gender and the Politics of Schooling, edited by M. Arnot and G. Weiner, Hutchinson, 1987, pp 309-331.
11. 'Teachers and gender politics' written with G. Weiner, in Gender and the Politics of Schooling, edited by M. Arnot and G. Weiner, Hutchinson, 1987, pp 354-370.
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# **I. ABSTRACT**

The twelve publications submitted for this thesis constitute a group of essays completed between 1979 and 1989 on related feminist issues in education. Each publication contributes to the overall project of developing a theory of class and gender relations in education.

Three stages in the construction of this theory are identified. These are:

- (a) a critical evaluation of theories concerning the social and cultural reproduction of class relations in terms of their applicability to the study of gender relations.
- (b) the construction of a feminist theory of gender that accounts for, among other things, the historical and class specific nature of gender relations in education.
- (c) an analysis of contemporary policy-making at central, local and institutional levels in relation to the promotion of equal opportunities for both sexes.

It is suggested that explanations of the relationship between education, the economy, the family and the state based upon male class relations cannot adequately account for the patterns of female education. A range of new concepts more appropriate for the study of gender relations is developed. These include a theory of male hegemony and the concept of gender code involving processes of recontextualisation and different modes of transmission of gender relations through schooling. These concepts are applied to an analysis of the structure and content of the secondary school curriculum, family and school cultures, co-education and boys' education.

The approach developed here is contrasted with other feminist perspectives on gender and education and consideration is given to the ways in which these perspectives have influenced educational policy and practice. The approaches to sex equality of central government are compared with those underlying teacher initiatives in this area. Finally a strategy is offered for the promotion of sex equality through school-based in-service courses focused on the personal and professional development of teachers.

## II. DECLARATION

This submission comprises twelve publications, eleven of which were written entirely by myself (either under the name of MacDonald or Arnot). Chapter 11, 'Teachers and gender politics' was jointly authored with Gaby Weiner. The original framework for the article, and especially the section 'Providing the evidence', was taken from my Open University course unit Sex Discrimination and Educational Change. New material was added to it from G.Weiner's own research. The final version of this article was therefore the result of close collaboration between the two authors.

No part of the material presented here has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification to the Open University or any other university or institution.

### **III INTRODUCTION**

#### **(a) THE CONTEXT**

#### **(b) DEVELOPING A THEORY OF CLASS AND GENDER RELATIONS IN EDUCATION**

Part 1: Rethinking reproduction theory

Part 2: Constructing a feminist theory of gender

Part 3: Interpreting the politics of gender reform

#### **(c) FEMINIST THEORISING**

#### **(d) CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIELD**

#### **(e) FOOTNOTES**

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## (a) THE CONTEXT

Feminist research on women's experiences has had a major impact on educational studies and has represented one of the most important developments in sociology of education since the 1960s. By challenging existing explanations of the role of education in society, it has offered new ways of accounting for the history of educational provision and practice; it has uncovered unexpected nuances and patterns in the dynamics of school life; it has introduced a range of new concepts into the sociological framework and has pointed out new directions for research. Effectively, feminist research has become a catalyst for change, particularly in our understanding of the nature and impact of education on women's lives.

Yet at the same time, we have reached a critical point in the study of gender relations in education. On the one hand, the research conducted over the last twenty years has helped promote a growing consensus about the problems faced by girls within the educational system and the sorts of strategies required to improve female and male educational experiences and to remove sex inequalities in education. On the other, different academic perspectives on gender and education seem increasingly more apparent and the relationship between them more conflictual.

Evidence of the nature of this consensus can be found, for example, in support for the National Curriculum introduced under the terms of the Education Reform Act 1988. This reform could be interpreted as representing, at least on the surface, a victory for feminists who have argued for a broad and balanced curriculum for all. Eileen Byrne, one of the main campaigners for the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and a leading academic researching women's education, argued forcefully against what she called 'our pragmatic and decentralised fatalism' in accepting for so long the unevenness of educational provision and achievement in the United Kingdom. In one of the first of a contemporary range of texts on women's education (Byrne, 1978), she proposed a national educational policy based on the principle of 'equal means the same'. A common core curriculum, she argued, was essential for the promotion of genuine equality between the sexes. Indeed it seems that the United

Kingdom has lagged well behind other countries in accepting this principle. The implications, according to Byrne, of accepting such a proposition would be:

*...that this country has to cease its comfortable evasion of the difficult but not impossible task of defining that common core.... I am not...talking of uniformity of detailed curricular content to the last historical date or set book, nor uniformity of teaching methodology, but that, for example a core of homecraft and parenthood, technology and manual skills, mathematics and a balanced core of the sciences, at least one creative art, a modern language, and so on, should be the essential heart of the same compulsory education of all girls and all boys - taught together - up to the school leaving age.*

(Byrne 1985, p100)

Although not all of Byrne's proposals for the common curriculum can be found within the newly constituted National Curriculum, the objectives of the latter are so broad that they could be used to encompass the former. The Education Reform Act 1988 stipulates that every pupil in maintained schools will be entitled to a curriculum which will '(a) promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society', and (b) prepare 'such pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life' (DES, 1989, p2). Equality of opportunity for boys and girls, according to proponents of the Act, will be available not merely through the provision of a range of compulsory core and foundation subjects but also through the improvement of standards of teaching and learning encouraged by the use of teacher appraisal schemes and of national assessment, programmes of study, and attainment targets (DES, 1989).

But is it the case that sex equality, along with class and race equality, is now to be promoted through national objectives? Clearly there is considerable debate over both the intentions and likely outcomes of the Education Reform Act, much of which reveals the caution characteristic of the field of gender (Kant, 1987; Miles and Middleton, 1989; David, 1989; Arnot, 1989 & 1990). The history of education and training policy in the

United Kingdom has not encouraged confidence in central government's ability to pay anything more than lipservice to equality between the sexes (Wolpe, 1976; Deem, 1981; Arnot, 1986; Wickham, 1987), nor for that matter to 'race' and class equality. Recent statements by Mr. Kenneth Baker who, as Secretary of State, introduced the Education Reform Bill at the 1987 Conservative Party Conference saying 'the pursuit of egalitarianism is now over', suggest that the development of the National Curriculum will not be any different. Feminists are alerted to the possibility that, yet again, boys and girls might still not receive the same education (1). Nevertheless, feminist criticisms of the curriculum proposals on the whole have focussed on the need to ensure that every pupil will have equal access to the National Curriculum and that the content of the new programmes of study and attainment targets will not reflect male and ethnocentric biases. They have not challenged the need for a common curriculum (e.g. Kant, 1987, Miles and Middleton, 1989, Arnot, 1989).

The current dilemma which now confronts those who wish to promote equal opportunities between the sexes is how far to support and work within a political project which clearly does not have 'egalitarianism' in mind. Taken in its totality the Education Reform Act 1988 has been interpreted as representing the final collapse of what has been called the 'social democratic consensus', a consensus which stressed the role of education in breaking down patterns of social inequality not merely of providing for the 'needs' of industry and economic growth (CCCS, 1981; Dale, 1989; Whitty, 1989). In its strongest form, this earlier approach aimed to produce equal outcomes through schooling. At its weakest, it represented a broad ranging concern for equality of opportunity in the sense of encouraging individual social mobility and a meritocratic social order.

The concept of equality of opportunity has been one of the most important aspects of educational policy-making this century. The 1944 Education Act gave this educational ideology its dominance in post-war educational planning, even if, within this tradition, many political battles have been fought (CCCS 1981; Finch 1984; Cosin 1986). By the 1970's, the concept of equal opportunity which had applied particularly to social class was extended to include gender and race divisions. Indeed it seems that the banner of equal opportunities has



been carried forward into the 1980's by those concerned about inequality between the sexes. It is not insignificant that local authorities and schools use 'equal opportunities' to refer to sex equality policies rather than to 'race' or class. This is perhaps because the concept of 'unequal access' seemed one of special importance when applied to inequalities between men and women in the employment sphere. Concern about these employment patterns, especially in terms of the shortage of scientific and technically skilled labour, has encouraged schools to develop this tradition in relation to girls' education. Reforms in this context may seem feasible and successful results more achievable, unlike those of class or 'race'.

By the late 1970's, the equal opportunities approach, with its concern for equal rights, equal access and participation, freedom of choice and the removal of sex discrimination had begun to dominate the field of gender and education (see Arnot 1981a; Middleton 1984; Arnot and Weiner 1987; Acker 1987). It was a perspective that suited the needs of policymakers, particularly in so far as it set up seemingly achievable targets and workable strategies within existing resources. It offered the possibility of using teachers as agents of change within a decentralised educational system which stressed the value of teacher and school autonomy. What was required for such strategies was not the wholesale restructuring of the educational system, but the provision of resources, support services, in-service training - in other words, encouragement. It was a perspective which took a 'safe', gradual and incremental view of social change, which would be achieved more through consensus than conflict, and through professional development rather than disciplining or punitive measures.

Within the academic world, much of the empirical research especially those projects which were successful in winning financial support followed this tradition, Sex-role socialisation theory, developed within sociology but also used by psychologists interested in sex stereotyping, offered the possibility of uncovering the ways in which boys and girls were being prepared for their assigned roles in society. It complemented the concern for equal rights since it revealed empirically the multitudinous and often quite subtle ways in which society channels each generation into rather narrow and conventional sex roles. Such patterns of socialisation whether found in the family, the media, amongst peer groups or in

educational institutions appeared to obstruct the child's full development. If such patterns of socialisation could be identified through academic research, then possibly pupils could be helped to 'break out' of their moulds.

For the first decade after the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, it appeared, on the surface, as if those working within the academic arena had a common project which allowed for a sharing of resources and collaboration. The initial task was the accumulation of evidence about male and female educational patterns, not least because the study of gender and education did not have a recognised place in the academic establishment either in terms of teaching or research. The same patterns of sex-stereotyping and the marginalisation of gender issues found in society could be recognised in the academic world. In the sociology of education, Banks (1980) and Acker (1981) found that sexual differentiation had been 'grossly neglected'. Banks argued:

*...it remains true that little attention has been paid to sex as a principle of educational discrimination and that little effort has been made to search for the explanation of such discrimination as can be found. An examination of any standard text-book in the field will demonstrate this clearly enough, so will a look at the most prominent theorists, working in this area.*

(Banks, 1980 p129)

Opposition amongst those in sociology of education, although rarely expressed explicitly in public or in writing, but nevertheless experienced by many female academics (2), often took the form of deriding work on gender for its lack of seriousness and a clear theoretical base, stressing its marginality and its status as a 'minority' group interest. Those concerned with gender issues needed to begin by winning recognition that gender studies represented a legitimate topic within the discipline and secondly by ensuring that it would always have a place on the academic agenda in the development of that discipline. It was these goals which encouraged individuals to support all forms of research on gender.



As a result, there seemed to be, according to Acker (1987), an apparent lack of sectarianism in feminist educational research. In Acker's view such writing 'manages to be constructively critical without the vitriol sometimes found in other spheres of feminist commentary'. She explains that this apparent harmony can possibly be traced to:

*the tradition of pragmatism in much education thought: the immediate goal of making conditions better overrides some of the theoretical disputes...*

*Additionally, in Britain, education has been rather peripheral to feminist theory...*

*Possibly pragmatism and marginality encourage educational scholars and activists into alliances across theoretical divides. (Also) the dominance of equal opportunities discourse in British public policy means that under an equal opportunities hat a socialist or radical feminist heart may beat!*

(Acker, 1987, p431-2) (my emphasis)

However by the mid 1980's, the tensions between various approaches that were hidden within such apparent unity of purpose became more visible. Distinctions between different feminist perspectives, particularly between liberal feminism with its concern for equality of opportunity and the more 'radical' alternatives of what has been called socialist feminism, radical feminism, black feminism and lesbian feminism (3), have become increasingly more significant. Such perspectives can affect the choice of research topic and the methodology, the interpretation of evidence, and also the recommendations for school policies. The 'equal opportunities' approach is now discussed as only one of a range of theoretical and political perspectives and increasingly it has been not able to offer shelter to such diverse and critical positions.

In the sociology of education, the divisions between different theoretical paradigms are especially apparent. The experience of analysing class inequalities in education in the 1970's exposed the incompatibility between liberal and socialist analyses of education, especially since the latter represented a major critique of the former. Not only was the failure of liberal reform programmes to reduce social inequality at issue but so too was the adequacy of the

reform programmes to reduce social inequality at issue but so too was the adequacy of the theory of education which underlay such a project. Alternative theories of the relationship of education to the state and the economy were developed in opposition to liberal approaches(4).

The incompatibility of liberal and socialist feminist research, however, was not immediately evident especially since so much of the documentation of sex inequality in education was provided by those working within the equal opportunities tradition. Theoretical analyses, such as that offered by Deem (1978), and MacDonald (1980), relied to a certain extent on the findings of such empirical evidence, in conjunction with the insights of radical feminists such as those found in Spender and Sarah (1980) and the early empirical research, for example, of Clarricoates (1978). Nevertheless the theoretical and political differences between sex role socialisation theory and the political economy tradition became increasingly obvious. The division could be captured in the distinction between a cultural and an economic theory (see Chapter 4) which reflected contemporary differences between what has been called cultural feminism and socialist feminism (e.g. Segal, 1987, 1989). It was hard to envisage an alliance being sustained between these two perspectives for any length of time.

Similarly concern has been expressed over the compatibility of liberal and radical feminist perspectives. The Developing Anti-Sexist Project (DASI), an early example of anti-sexist education, revealed the implication for teachers of these two perspectives. The distinction as the teachers experienced it, was between agreeing to participate within existing male power structures, or attempting to challenge and remove those structures (Cornbleet and Libovitch, 1983). Yet, the alliance between liberal and radical feminist theories of education has lasted longer than might have been expected, perhaps because they have both focussed upon the impact of male dominance in education and on the common experiences of girls as girls, rather than the divisions between women of different social classes or racial groups. Secondly the emphasis upon socialisation patterns and the reinforcement of sex roles in the work, for example, of Delamont (1980) and Kelly (1981) could be used in



effect of patriarchal domination or sex role stereotyping often appears similar in the analyses of classroom interaction, textual analysis and curriculum organisation (5). However, increasingly the theoretical explanations and topics chosen by each perspective revealed their different stances. Radical feminists concerned with women's oppression through sexuality and heterosexual relations concentrated more noticeably on, sexual harassment, sexual abuse and sexist language in schools and the possibilities of framing a more liberating women's culture and feminist pedagogy in education (e.g. Spender and Sarah, 1980; Lees, 1986; Mahony, 1985; Weiner, 1985). In contrast liberal feminists' emphasised the patterns of unequal access in terms of sex discrimination, curriculum option choices and male and female experiences in, and attitudes to, particular subjects, careers and life styles (e.g. Grafton et al, 1983; Whyte, 1985; Harding, 1988).

By the mid 1980's, distinctions between these two traditions were being made, especially as the lack of success of equal opportunities projects was becoming evident (c.f. Kelly 1985b). Even though some feminists had argued for the 'radical future of liberal feminism' (Eisenstein, 1981), others, such as O'Brien (1986) in the context of Canadian studies of education, stressed its incompatibility with a patriarchal analysis of education. O'Brien argued:

*As feminism is committed to equality of condition [i.e. outcome] rather than to equality of opportunity with its radically unequal reward system, many feminists, including this writer, believe that liberalism is not ultimately consistent with feminism. Despite the lip service to women's rights and the quite concrete gains - such as suffrage - which liberalism has grudgingly given to women, it remains fundamentally patriarchal in theory and practice.*

(O'Brien, 1986, p95)

Other criticisms of the equal rights approach have also developed - the most noticeable being those of black feminists, concerned about the institutionalised separation between policies designed to promote equal opportunities between the sexes and those which



focussed on race equality. They have challenged the assumption that one could identify a common educational experience based solely on gender, by providing evidence of the impact of racism in education and its effects on black pupils' and teachers' experiences (for example Wright, 1987; Bangar and McDermott, 1989; McKellar, 1989). Researchers using the concept of sex role stereotypes have also been challenged to take account of racial stereotypes experienced by black pupils and teachers (Amos and Parmar, 1981; Brah and Minhas, 1985). Furthermore black feminists have criticised sex role socialisation theory for promoting what they call a 'pathological' or 'deficit model' of black family structures (e.g. Parmar, 1981). Phoenix (1987) analyses the implications of this normative model of nuclear family life for black children's gender development and their educational experiences. Like other black feminists, she stresses the interconnections of race, class and gender and the need to analyse the impact of such power relations on black women's experiences.

Sex-role socialisation theory has also been challenged by those concerned with sexuality and, in particular, with the experiences of lesbians and homosexual men. The development of a separate tradition of lesbian studies in the United States has not occurred within the British context (6). Although the issue of female sexuality and the different lives of heterosexual and lesbian women in British society has received considerable attention within women's studies, these issues have been neglected in the education sphere probably because of the sensitivity of the topic within schools, especially in the context of Conservative policy and the backlash against heterosexism awareness courses (Squirrell, 1989). However, the experiences of lesbian pupils and of lesbian teachers which have been documented by, for example, Nava (1982), Trenchard and Warren (1984), The Gay Teachers' Group (1987) and Squirrell (1989), reveal how far simple unitary concepts of 'the female sex role' cannot account for the power associated with heterosexuality and the forms of harassment experienced by lesbians in education.

Connell (1983) and Carrigan et al (1985) have also elaborated on the critique of sex role socialisation theory implied by the Men's Liberation Movement. They have pointed to the assumptions behind concepts of 'normal' gender development and the failure to consider

the impact on homosexual men of the assumed superiority of heterosexual masculinity and the suppression of homosexuality in society. Also in reviewing Talcott Parsons' (1954) formulation of sex role theory, Carrigan et al (1985) note the limitations of his argument that homosexuality was 'universally prohibited' so as to reinforce the differentiation of sex roles. They conclude:

*Apart from being historically false (homosexuality was and is institutionalised in some societies), such a theory fails to register tension and power processes within gender relations..... The underlying structural notion in his analysis of gender is always differentiation not relation. Hence his automatic assumption is that the connection between the two sex roles is one of complementarity not power.*

(Carrigan et al, 1987, p39)

Such debates are now increasingly visible in the recent attempts to classify gender and education perspectives (Middleton, 1984; Acker, 1987, Arnot and Weiner, 1987). Whilst such analyses may not agree on the number and naming of each perspective, (nor is the placing of individuals within the different categories unproblematic), it certainly appears that the apparent consensus within the academic field cannot easily be sustained. If anything, the current state of the art is one which is not merely exciting but also presents a particularly appropriate context for this thesis. I agree with Connell's (1987, p.38) comment that:

*The state of the field in the mid-1980's is a paradox. The impulse of the last two decades has produced a mass of factual research and a lively theoretical debate, including some theorizing of very high quality indeed. It is difficult to think of any other field of the social sciences where work as penetrating and original has been going on. Yet as the social theory of gender has blossomed, the differences between lines of thought have become more distinct, the conceptual and political distances greater. Current theories of gender are not converging. Rather they*



*present incompatible accounts of the issues, sometimes by marking off separate parts of the field.*

Connell suggests that the time is ripe for the construction of a theory of gender. This text attempts to provide a theory, or at least an attempt to identify its premises. The focus here is specifically a theory of gender relations in education - the objective being to be able to explain the various patterns of gender differentiation found within the structures and processes of schooling. The assumption is that such a theory would encourage the development of realistic strategies and programmes of action - it represents therefore one part of a political project to combine theory and practice in the cause of social change.

The body of work represented here was produced over the course of ten years. It is therefore shaped by the ebb and flow of diverse influences. Firstly, it has been written alongside preparing teaching materials on issues of class, gender and race relations in education. It has, therefore, been shaped by the gathering momentum of academic research on gender and education - a momentum that probably has not been surpassed by any other sub-specialism within sociology of education (7). Secondly the acceleration of interest amongst teachers, researchers, lecturers and policy makers in gender issues has also allowed a new range of topics to be studied and has helped frame new theoretical and practical questions. Each article therefore has not been written in a vacuum but represents a contribution to the particular academic and political climate at that time. This is especially true of those articles which were drafted initially as keynote speeches for international sociology of education conferences in the United Kingdom and Canada ( Chapters 3,6 and 7) or were commissioned by journals or editors to provide up-to-date syntheses of the field (Chapters 1,4,5 and 8).

In the rest of this introduction, I shall describe the most salient features of each chapter. As will be shown, the sequence of chapters in this thesis cannot be characterised as a linear progression. Although there is a unity about them which is shaped by my developing thought and work in the area, the series of publications represents my responses

to different related feminist issues in education. The initial challenge, as I saw it, was that of providing a critique of existing 'male' models of educational analysis and considering the possibilities of modifying and extending their frameworks to encompass gender relations. I have therefore clustered these articles together in Part I. The second task was that of developing alternative feminist frameworks. The strategy I used was to focus on a series of topics such as the relationship between family and school and the issues of coeducation and the problem of masculinity. These articles are discussed in Part 2 of the thesis. In more recent years, it seemed important to gain an overview of the role of the state in defining gender relations and of the new political strategies developed by central and local government and by teachers and schools to promote equal opportunity between the sexes. The culmination of this final set of articles can be found in the attempt to bring the theory of gender directly into the practitioner's world. The results of my work can be found in Part 3 of the thesis.

The conclusion of this sequence, therefore, is precisely to develop new directions for research, rather than to provide neat answers. In the following three sub-sections of the introduction I shall describe what I see as my quest for a theory of class and gender relations in education and attempt to describe the contribution of each article to that project. There is however a wider context to this project than that of sociology of education. Research on gender and education is part of the emerging field of women's studies and feminist theory in any particular aspect of women's experience cannot fail to address itself to the goals and strategies, whether academic or practical, of what has been called the 'new' women's liberation movement. This movement, which grew out of, amongst other things, the demand for civil rights in the late 1960s, has had considerable effect on, not just the academic world (with the development of women's studies courses, access courses for women etc), but even more importantly on the climate of opinion in society generally. It has led to the establishment of a multitude of feminist campaigns and pressure groups, the promotion of specific policies (eg. The Equal Pay Act, the Sex Discrimination Act) and reforms of existing legislation. Such a movement has an agenda of its own which has been framed within the wider political arena of men and women's lives. While it is impossible to describe in detail



the nature and considerable impact of this movement here, in the second part of this introduction I will consider the role of feminist theory which has been developed by those involved in women's studies and consider its relation to educational practice. I conclude this introduction by attempting to assess the contribution which my work, located as it is within the socialist feminist tradition of gender studies, has made to the sociology of education and consider, albeit briefly, the significance of that tradition in the current climate. I shall therefore be standing back from the particular chapters in order to consider the directions for future research which are still emerging from this tradition.

## **(b) DEVELOPING A THEORY OF CLASS AND GENDER RELATIONS IN EDUCATION**

This project started to take shape at a key stage in the sociology of education, when theories of social class relations within schooling were having considerable impact. The challenges to liberalism and, particularly, to the social democratic educational reforms of the post-war period for their failure to reduce social class inequality were at their strongest. Not only were social class patterns of educational achievement, especially unequal access to higher education shown to be maintained (Halsey, Heath and Ridge, 1980, Goldthorpe, 1980), but patterns of class privilege were increasingly being connected to the organisation of schooling. The structure of the curriculum and the selection of educational knowledge, the ideologies of teaching, learning and assessment were identified as important contributors to such patterns of social class reproduction (8).

The major themes of what was called the 'new' sociology of education were expressed in the language of power, social control, and even of domination and oppression. The analyses investigated the political framework of schooling by exploring the relationships between, for example, education, the economy and the state. Similarly, the sociology of culture (whether of the curriculum or of youth cultures) focussed attention on the role of class cultures, especially the contribution which cultural conflict played in class struggle. At the heart of these studies lay the goal of moving away from the 'naive possibilitarianism' (Whitty, 1974) of sociological analyses that failed to take account of the impact of the social structure on the form and content of school experiences. Arguments were put forward that schooling might, in effect, be unable to deliver even such limited goals as promoting equality of opportunity, especially if schools were designed precisely to maintain social inequalities in the interests of the dominant social classes or 'capital'. Debates concerning the nature of the relationship between the power structure and education ranged from stressing, at one extreme, the determining force of the economy, or alternatively proposing the relative or even 'delegated' autonomy of schooling (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Hall, 1981).



Within such sociological analyses, several 'illusions' identified as part of the liberal tradition were challenged. For example, the illusion of the neutrality of educational knowledge, especially the view that what was taught within schools had been selected for its inherent worth rather than as a result of vested interests, was counterposed with theories stressing the ways in which dominant social classes had appropriated education for their own purposes. Also the illusions of free choice within education, of the neutrality of forms of assessment supposedly testing ability and of the procedures for allocating pupils to different educational routes, were all being challenged by the identification of class bias in school practices.

Such critiques were highly controversial, not least because of the references to a 'hidden' and even 'unconscious' structuring of the educational system. Sociologists wanted to delve beneath the taken-for granted surface reality of schooling, to go behind the detail of student-teacher interaction in the classroom in order to uncover the ideologies of intelligence and the legitimation of particular class cultural styles of teaching and learning. Behind such everyday practices, it was assumed that deeper 'codes' or principles which governed the organisation of schooling could be found. The goal was to analyse whether a connection existed between such educational principles (and the ideologies which sustained them) and the principles and ideologies governing economic production and class relations. Whether structurally or culturally, education was analysed as a major agency for the 'reproduction' of the class structure and its unequal relations of power (8).

Such theories of social and cultural reproduction attempted, in their different ways, to relate the structure of society to the principles which governed collective and individual action, or put another way, to link a material analysis of the political economy to forms of class consciousness, ideology and practice. In surveying the contribution of authors such as Bowles and Gintis (1979), Althusser (1971), Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), Bernstein (1977), Freire (1982) and Gramsci (trs. 1971), I came to the following conclusions:

*The assumption underlying most of the 'reproduction' theories is that education plays a mediating role between the individual's consciousness and society at large. These theorists maintain that the rules which govern social behaviour, attitudes, morals, and belief are filtered down from the macro level of economic and political structures to the individual via work experience, educational processes, and family socialisation. The individual acquires a particular awareness and perception of the society in which he (she) lives. And it is this understanding and attitude towards the social order which constitutes his (her) consciousness. The concept (of consciousness) has therefore taken on particular significance within the context of theories of social and cultural reproduction... By acquiring an awareness both of the nature of social conditioning and the potential for acting upon it, the individual or groups of individuals in a social class, it is argued, can learn not only to formulate alternatives but also to bring about change. The different emphases placed... on social order or social change, on macro levels or micro processes, on structural or interactional features, derives from a variety of conceptions of the ability or inability of individuals and social classes to act in and upon the social world. In the context of educational strategies for change, these (reproduction) theories have different implications, for in each a particular relationship between schooling and society is postulated.*

*(MacDonald, 1977 p60)*

The debate concerning the relationship between structure and action and the various complex solutions offered to this problem (9) arose out of a need to explain social stability at the same time as describing the sources and nature of social change. How far could such theory account for the maintenance of the status quo as well as identify the various forms of contradictions, struggle and conflict to be found within any social institution or social formation? What indeed were the origins of alternative ideologies, of counter hegemonies or even of 'dominated' cultures? Clearly the critical analysis of schooling would have to examine the broader political relations surrounding schooling.



In 1981, I, like a number of others (e.g. Hall 1981; Whitty 1981; Johnson 1981), turned to the work of Gramsci to break away from the functionalism and pessimism of early versions of reproduction theory. I took the view that:

*While most (reproduction) theorists argue that situations of conflict and negotiation exist, they tend not to identify the ways in which such situations are catered for and responded to within education. This difficulty of accounting for change arises most probably because of the lack of any historical analysis of the relationship between school structures and economic-political organisation....If it is accepted that education provides the stake and site of class struggle, then any educational theory must surely be concerned to identify how this class struggle is resolved in different historical periods....Perhaps with such an analysis we may become aware of the consistency of contradictions and the exceptional occurrences of social equilibrium.....(This would) mean developing an understanding of how stability occurs despite conflict, how order is maintained over and above the force for change. Any system of reproduction in so far as it operates within a cultural hegemony must be struggled for, won and maintained in the context of opposition.*

(MacDonald, 1981, p.103-104)

It was clear at this point that not only was it important to bring the history of class struggle into the analysis - a project so successfully achieved by Brian Simon (1965, 1974a & b) and Richard Johnson (1979, 1981) - but also the influence of other major state apparatuses such as the family, the mass media and culture should be considered in so far as they impinged upon the educational system. Indeed they might also provide sources of ideological conflict within society and between different 'state apparatuses' (c.f. Althusser, 1971).

By 1977, those of us working with the concepts of social or cultural reproduction were being challenged on a number of issues, from a variety of different sources. Allegations

were to include those of excessive functionalism and of economic determinism, as a result of setting up a far too simple and mono-causal account of schooling (10). Further, the content of education appeared to have become largely irrelevant from this perspective, such was the concern for the structures in which pupils learned, rather than the detail of what they learnt in school. The development of a sociology of the school and of teaching and learning also offered data about school life that could not easily fit into reproduction theory. Clearly, therefore, there was still a need to address the thorny question of how to relate macro theory with micro analysis of classroom interaction, and to take account of the ideological content of the curriculum without falling into the trap of relativism and functionalism.

Paul Willis' (1977) pioneering and highly influential study of class cultural relations in school also suggested that working class male youth were not simply 'reproduced'. The 'lads' constructed their own counter culture in ways which implied a complex interweaving of class, race and gender identities, shaped by both ideological and material practices. Although very different in style and focus, Sharp and Green's (1976) research into progressive primary education also raised important questions about the structuring of the school experience and the subtle ways in which class differentiation can occur in child-centred classrooms. The development of youth cultural studies (e.g. McRobbie, 1978; Hebdige, 1978; Fuller, 1980, 1982; Cashmore & Troyna, 1982) revealed the diversity of school experiences, some of which were hard to squash into the simple dichotomies of white, male, middle and working class cultures. Furthermore, ethnographic work, such as that by Anyon (1980), Woods (1979) and Ball (1981), began to offer insights into the ways in which school structures and processes shape social relations in their own right. The relationship, therefore, between macro structures and microprocesses were clearly more complicated and contradictory than those assumed by early versions of class reproduction theory.

But other challenges to class reproduction theory were also being mounted outside the boundaries of sociology of education. As early as 1966, Mitchell had identified a range of functions which the family, and particularly women in the family, played in reproducing the



social relations of production and the work force. Three years later Margaret Benston (1969, p118) a marxist feminist, argued that 'women as a group...have a definite relation to the means of production and that this is different from that of men.'

By the 1970s, many feminist academics had started to develop their own class analysis to take account of women's position, not just in the economy but also in the family. The difficulty of explaining women's unpaid domestic labour and its relationship to capital became the key theme of what was called the 'domestic labour debate' (11). Underlying this debate was an attempt to identify the specifics of women's position in the class structure and, at the same time, to develop a marxist theory of class that abandoned its male biases.

The problem of relating class to gender, or put another way, of marxism to feminism, received considerable attention at this point with many texts grappling with the possibilities and limitations of this project (e.g. Hartman (1979); Eisenstein (1979); Barrett (1980); Segal (1987). Such debates, although never resolved, clearly had significance for educational theories structured around concepts of social class and class relations. If class theory was being challenged by feminists, then the time was ripe for reconsidering the assumptions behind class reproduction theory in education.

## **Part I: RETHINKING REPRODUCTION THEORY**

My first objective was to bring together class and gender in discussing the relationship between schooling and society. If the new context for education was to be both capitalism and patriarchy, then the new project was one of trying to make sense of both the interconnections and the contradictions between these two power structures within schooling. I wished to analyse the ways in which the structure and culture of schooling was shaped, not just by class, but also by gender and to consider how these two sets of social relations might frame individual experience and identity. In tackling this project I was well aware that one could not 'add on' gender to class analysis, without becoming guilty of what O'Brien (1984) was later to call 'commatiation' (the process of listing class, comma gender,

comma race) - in other words, the failure to investigate the relationship between these three sets of relations. Some re-evaluation of the concept of class was clearly necessary. Feminist analysis had already indicated new directions for research, particularly in terms of understanding the patterns of male and female employment, the structure of the labour market, patterns of social mobility, theories of the family and the history of the housewife (12). This wealth of new material created the possibility, therefore, of re-assessing the role of education in the creation of class identities, and of breaking away from simple class reproduction models. At the same time the development of a more complex reproduction theory generated new questions about the production of meanings and the structuring processes involved in education (for an overview see, for example, Arnot & Whitty, 1982).

A more continuous and deeper influence on my work, however, was the theoretical work of Bernstein (1977) and Gramsci (trs. 1971). Bernstein's theory of codes held a fascination for me. I felt that the possibilities contained within his theory had not been exhausted by a class analysis. His analysis of the principles which lie embedded within a social and symbolic order offered a range of concepts and insights which could be useful in generating a theory of gender. This was especially true since gender, in contrast with sex (see Oakley, 1972), was by definition a social classification and one which had become a major organising principle in the history of mass schooling. Bernstein's distinctions between power and control and between classification and framing, his concepts of 'recontextualisation' and 'modes of transmission' and the significance he attached to forms of identity, experience and property were to play a major role in the development of my own work.

On the other hand I had already found Gramsci's theory of hegemony particularly useful in understanding patterns of struggle and, even more importantly, the insecurity of power relations that I had already argued were essential components of a 'reproduction' theory (MacDonald, 1981). In the context of women's education, the concept of hegemony seemed important, not least because of the feminist project of making women visible as political subjects, capable of acting in their own right and for their own interests. Education,



paradoxically, has been one of the major agencies used for the 'liberation', not merely the domination, of women historically. As it turned out, I was not alone in turning to Gramsci's concept of hegemony in order to describe patriarchal relations. Other feminists working within education were also to use the concept in their work (e.g. Weiler, 1987; O'Brien, 1987; Kenway 1988; Acker 1988). In contrast, those who have employed Bernstein's theory of educational transmission for the study of gender and education are few and far between - Middleton (1982) is a notable exception.

My first attempt at developing a theory of what I called 'socio-cultural reproduction of women's education' (Chapter 1) used the research published in the anthology Schooling for Women's Work (Deem, 1980) as a basis for (a) challenging existing theories of social and cultural reproduction and (b) taking the first steps towards a theory of gender and class relations in education. Significantly, using the insights of feminists such as Beechey (1978) and Hartman (1979), I differentiated between the material bases of patriarchy and capitalism and emphasised the historical specificity rather than universal nature of gender relations. I sought to introduce into theories of class reproduction the role of the family under capitalism, domestic labour, the patterns of female employment and patriarchal relations of production. But I wanted to do it in such a way so as not to compromise the integrity of male - female relations as important in their own right.

The key issue was defining the nature of the relationship between female education and women's position in society. Did education make the same contribution to the reproduction of women's class position as it did for men? Was education responsible for the reproduction of gender, not just class relations?

The conclusions I reached were threefold. First I stressed the importance of not collapsing gender divisions into those of class. Instead I emphasised the potential contradictions that might arise between these two separate relations. Yates (1987), for example, saw as significant the following statement from my article:

*The contradictory nature of women's position in society, rather than being resolved through schooling is more likely to be accentuated...*

(MacDonald, 1980, p 25).

As a result of this contradictory relationship, it seemed likely that women were only indirectly prepared for waged work. I offered a detailed critique therefore of social reproduction theorists such as Bowles and Gintis (1979) showing that they had failed to analyse in sufficient depth the differences between male and female educational experiences.

Secondly it was also becoming evident that the family had to be brought into such sociological theory. In assessing the applicability of Althusser's theory of ideological state apparatuses I had taken a different stance from that of Deem (1978) and David (1978): I argued that Althusser's (1971) theory was not particularly helpful especially since it had not identified patriarchal ideologies and the ways these mediated and contextualised class ideologies (13). Although I appreciated the importance of what Althusser called the 'family-education' couple, I did not at this point ascertain its full significance.

Thirdly in this article I intended to suggest directions for research. I had, for example, proposed that Bernstein's theory of educational transmission might provide valuable insights into the ways in which schools use gender as an organising principle. His theory suggested that we might look at the ways in which the selection and organisation of knowledge and its forms of transmission in the classroom were shaped by gender relations. A concept of 'gender code' derived from Bernstein's concept of educational codes seemed important since it emphasised the fact, on the one hand, that gender relations were socially constructed principles of classification which could structure the organisation of schooling, and on the other hand, would 'frame' classroom interaction with consequences for the formation of individuals identity, experience and property. Gender, like class, might shape educational experiences through symbolic structures, not merely through the transmission of sex role stereotypes and conventional gendered attitudes.



However, the relationship between class and gender as organising principles of education was highly problematic and using Willis' research, I attempted for the first time to display just how problematic it was:

*Paradoxically,..., while the school may not succeed in transmitting gender definitions which can merge easily with prescribed class identities, pupils may still acquire gender identities (in school) which prepare them indirectly for their future class position.*

(MacDonald, 1980, p24)

As Kenway (1988) and Yates (1988) have argued, my critique of existing class reproduction theory had led me away from any simple theory of the 'functional fit between patriarchy and capitalism'. Yates, for example, argues that:

*...although MacDonald sees schooling as an institution for social reproduction, and although she draws attention to change in society as the key to general change in schooling, her attempt to unravel in some detail the ways in which gender and class processes interact in schooling, shows schooling as other than a simple functional force for the status quo.*

(Yates, 1988, p307)

However the result, according to Yates is that I, like Barrett (1980), may have presented the relationship between these two power structures as 'unresolved'.

In an Open University course unit Class, Gender and Education (MacDonald, 1981), I was able to investigate in more depth the relationship between education and the economy. I explored dual labour market and human capital theories, the nature of patriarchal relations in the mode of production, the domestic labour debate and the history of girls' education in relation to these. Although this text proposed a variety of ways in which school reproduces gender relations within the family, the main concern, was to develop an analysis of the

reproduction of patriarchal relations in the social relations of production and the reproduction of female wage labour. The emphasis was therefore largely economic (14).

The development of a cultural theory of gender, in contrast, took me deeper into the work of Pierre Bourdieu. I was already familiar with his theory of habitus, cultural capital and cultural reproduction through education (MacDonald, 1977). However, I had not yet considered the applicability of his work to gender studies. Again I asked whether such theory offered useful concepts for a theory of class and gender. In 'Cultural reproduction: the pedagogy of sexuality' I reviewed Bourdieu's Outline of a Theory of Practice (1977a) and reassessed his influential text Reproduction in Education, Culture and Society (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

The focus in this article (Chapter 2) was to investigate in greater detail the significance of classificatory systems. The legacy of Durkheimian structural anthropology found in Bourdieu's and Bernstein's work encouraged the identification of systems of symbolic classification of which gender, along with class and age provided the basis. As Chapter 1 had indicated, I was especially interested in how such symbolic classifications structured the educational system and had therefore shaped female and male consciousness and the possibilities for social change in gender relations. Although my feminist rereading of Bourdieu's work in Chapter 1 had been critical, especially because of the assumptions he had made about the communality of male and female experiences within class cultures and in the educational system, the review of his theoretical framework in Chapter 2 alerted me to the usefulness of certain key concepts.

Sociology of education by the late 1970s, particularly the work of critical theorists, had focussed almost exclusively on secondary education as the transit point for entry into paid employment. Yet Bourdieu's analysis of the Kayble Society in Algeria provided a salutary reminder of the importance of not neglecting informal education, especially 'domestic pedagogic work' usually performed by women in the family. Although I did not go on to develop this concept myself, authors such as Walkerdine (1981) later were to refer to this..



notion. Recent work on mothering provides ample evidence of the significance of such female childrearing practices for gender identities (Steedman, 1985; New and David, 1985; and Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989).

Secondly, Bourdieu's work clearly signalled the need to analyse sexual identities. Despite drawing on Marxist theory, particularly for his educational analysis, Bourdieu, unlike so many other male reproduction theorists, had incorporated the sexual division of labour and the division of sexual labour (i.e. biological reproduction) into his analysis. At that point, work on sexual identity had remained largely underdeveloped especially within sociology of education. The concept of 'gender' being developed seemed to encapsulate somewhat unproblematically, all 'sexed' subjectivities and experiences. Little use was made of psychoanalytic theories in the study of education in contrast to media studies, feminist film and art history. It has taken authors such as Chodorow (1978, 1979) and Connell (1983, 1987) to bring such theories into investigations of 'socialisation' in the family and schooling. In contrast Aggleton (1987), who sought to discover how sexual identities were formed in middle class homes and their effects on young people's educational experiences has referred to my analysis of Bourdieu in developing a more sociological analysis of sexuality. Middleton (1985), also quoting my article, looked at how the formation of sexual identities and the reproduction of the sexual division of labour had affected a group of teachers.

Bourdieu's concepts of body hexis and the 'domestication of the body', described in Chapter 2, also captured nicely the relationship between social subjectivity and biological presence - a relationship later explored independently by Connell (1983) in the context of masculinity, but by few others in the field. It was precisely what Bourdieu called the 'dialectics between objectification and embodiment' that captured my interest at this juncture. It seemed to offer a new perspective on the relationship between structure and agency which took account of a learned physical presence, not merely the process of acquiring the principles for the organisation of work nor, indeed, just the acceptance of gendered expectations and conventions. By bringing Bourdieu's work out of the domain of class

analysis and into gender and education studies, I hoped to stress the importance of such structural analyses, for the concept of socialisation.

However, there were considerable difficulties in applying the analysis of symbolic classifications drawn from a study of a relatively homogeneous, agricultural society to the very different context of advanced industrialised societies with its highly specialised social division of labour. On the surface, it seemed that the concept of cultural capital, if applied to gender relations within class cultures, might provide a simpler and more useful conceptual tool for feminist researchers than some of the other concepts identified in Chapter 2. It allowed for the possibility of considering how cultural capital affected the reproduction of gender divisions, especially since it revealed how gender divisions were experienced within particular class cultures. The analysis I offered in this article proved useful to Middleton (1985) who used the concept of cultural capital to help her understand the biographies of feminist teachers. Jones (1988) also provides a fascinating study of race, gender and class in New Zealand classrooms, identifying the cultural capital of Pakeha (white) middle class girls in contrast to that of Pacific Island girls.

There are many criticisms of Bourdieu's theory, not least in the difficulty of locating in his work any possibilities for major social reform. Feminists reading my article might be forgiven for thinking that major social change, or reform of gender relations might not be possible. From the perspectives offered in my first two articles, it would seem that minor 'restructuration' of existing educational principles rather than the removal of social divisions might be the only realistic goal for those in education - such was the strength of the symbolic structures.

In 1980, I was asked to present a keynote speech to an international sociology of education conference. It was the first opportunity I had to bring together, in public, these various strands of thinking and to present it to my colleagues. The conference focussed on the curriculum and the conceptual debates explored the notions of resistance, contradiction,



correspondence and reproduction. We had reached a point in sociology of education where reproduction theory was being reassessed and developed, but not abandoned.

My contribution to this debate was to pull a gender dimension into the discussion. In the talk 'Schooling and the reproduction of class and gender relations' (Chapter 3), I chose as my theme the content of the curriculum and its contribution to the construction of class and gender identities. Although still within the framework of reproduction theory, I concentrated upon the nature of schooling rather than the economy. I took the view that class relations had a determining influence on the shape of gender relations in education. I even went so far as to suggest that the latter helped in the processes for reproduction of the former. The conditions for the congruence of class and gender relations in education was provided by a 'bourgeois hegemony' - i.e. the cultural domination of the working classes by the bourgeoisie. Legal, political and educational agencies of the state, I argued, imposed or rather attempted to impose specific definitions of gender on each new generation. There was an attempt by the bourgeoisie,

*to gain the consent of women to a definition of femininity which locates their primary role as keepers of the home with only secondary involvement in waged work. Also the consent of men has to be won to a definition of masculinity which involves their leaving their homes to go out to work and to be responsible for the family income.*

(MacDonald, 1981, p31)

As far as I was aware at that time, I was the first to introduce Gramsci's concept of hegemony into the study of gender and education, even though it had clearly achieved considerable popularity in the context of class analysis. Like many other sociologists at that time, I was moving away from the more 'mechanistic' models of 'correspondence principle' outlined by Bowles and Gintis, towards a theory of power and consent. The concept of hegemony allowed for the possibility that definitions of masculinity and femininity were class specific rather than universal. One could not therefore identify one educational

ideology across all social classes, such as a domestic education ideology (15), nor could one investigate simple notions of 'sex roles' without referring to class relations (e.g. a stance taken by a number of contributors to the edited collections of Deem, 1980 and Kelly, 1981). I argued one could find class-specific sets of gender relations within bourgeois hegemony. I was also at pains to stress that the contradictions between class and gender were also simultaneously being reproduced through schooling.

The analysis of the content of the curriculum was an attempt to synthesise my earlier work on gender codes and Bourdieu's work on culture. In this article I took the opportunity to think through the implications of such theories in the context of the secondary school curriculum with its structural divisions, its gendered images of specific subjects and its ideological content. I noted, for example, the following processes:

*The transference of femininity, for example, from the student to the school subject and back again to the student exemplifies the process of objectification and embodiment.*

(MacDonald, 1980, p37)

Unfortunately I did not have the chance to reveal how this process developed in practice but I was very interested to see Kelly's (1985b) use of this idea in accounting for the masculinity of science - the result of a process of 'gender attribution'. She also adopted what had become a key concept in my work - the 'recontextualisation of gender'. This concept, derived from Bernstein, seemed particularly appropriate for the analysis of gender, since it referred to the work of the school in first decontextualising and then recontextualising family culture. The gap between family and school in the context of gender seemed an especially significant part of the experience of class conflict and control. Recontextualising as a process might refer, for example, to the ways in which 'the notions of appropriate behaviour for each sex are converted into appropriate academic disciplines'. In effect pupils, moving from working class definitions of gender would be socialised into bourgeois definitions of masculinity and femininity by learning the rules for organising male and female



forms of academic knowledge. Structural divisions found in society such as those between public and private, home and work and their associations with male and female spheres, would be maintained through the selection and organisation of educational knowledge. Thus pupils would experience the rules governing bourgeois gendered culture - in the case of working class pupils perhaps for the first time. Significantly both Willis (1977) and Bourdieu (1977b) referred to the resistance of working class boys and men to the alleged 'effeminacy' of middle class culture.

If the concepts of gender attribution and recontextualising stressed the 'work' of the school, so too did my analysis of curriculum texts. I emphasised the importance of not seeking simple answers to the question of how gender roles are maintained. Instead I proposed identifying how contradictions and conflict can be produced within gender categories. Gender research on school texts seemed to restrict itself to somewhat descriptive content analysis that ironically seemed to legitimate the existence of homogeneous sex stereotypes and confirm simple theories of gender reproduction (16).

It was becoming clear from this analysis of the curriculum that the research developing within the mainstream of gender studies bore very little relationship to that developing around concepts of class and capital. Were the two perspectives in fact even compatible? It was possible at that time to begin to distinguish two different perspectives on gender - one predominantly cultural, the other mainly economic. The cultural theory of gender using sex-role socialisation theory contrasted sharply in terms of assumptions and explanations from what I called the 'political economy of education'. This latter perspective concentrated upon the history of state schooling, the class and gender ideologies of educational provision and forms of youth cultures.

In 'Culture and Political Economy: dual perspectives in the sociology of women's education' (Chapter 4), these and other differences between the two traditions were explored. The article represented one of the first overviews of the emerging field of gender and education in the United Kingdom. Drawing on a range of academic research, I

constructed perhaps too arbitrary a dichotomy between these two perspectives, but nevertheless it suggested, I think, a useful framework within which to organise the analysis of gender. It was used by many for these purposes (e.g. Middleton, 1984; Whitty, 1985; Burgess, 1986; David, 1986; Weiler, 1987; Kenway, 1988).

Various problems associated with each perspective were identified. The political economy approach was questioned, for example, about its failure to tackle adequately gender relations and male power. Despite locating my own work in this tradition, I argued that:

*...the political economy perspective with its Marxist orientation tends to undertheorise and under-represent the impact of specifically patriarchal forms of domination and control. It is unclear in these analyses... why gender divisions were advantageous to capital in the control of the workforce....Gender analysis ....is being fitted into class analysis rather than encouraging the development of new theory.*

(Arnot, 1981, p113)

Such criticisms paved the way for me to distance myself from reproduction theory and to begin to give more weight to gender relations. However I was becoming increasingly unhappy with the sorts of gender research in education that seemed in grave danger of recreating many of the illusions for which liberal theory had already been criticised in the 1970s. The misrecognition of the state, the unproblematic notion of socialisation, the stress on attitudes rather than structures, on stereotypes rather than ideologies and the circularity of argument from cause to effect - all pointed to the dangers of basing strategies for change on such work. Yet it was this tradition of research that was becoming dominant in gender and education studies and was being adopted by education policy makers and teachers (17).

The contradictions between such liberal and political economy perspectives were also becoming increasingly obvious, but no more so than in the ways in which the relationship between the family and the school was posed especially within the former tradition where a



continuity of gender socialisation was assumed rather than proven. One of the most important points made in this article concerned the necessity of investigating any conflict between home and school cultures and the implications for pupils' schooling. Kelly et al (1982) picked up this point and provided empirical data to substantiate the claim.

This critique of liberal theory of gender and education was early. Although Wolpe (1978) had challenged stratification theory, there seemed, to be a reluctance to criticise sex-role socialisation theory in the United Kingdom, even though as I argued, when one 'moved beyond liberal feminist concerns for attitudes, the roots of gender differentiation remained blurred'. This reluctance, however, now seems to have been abandoned as can be seen in the work of O'Brien (1983), Middleton (1984), Connell (1985), Acker (1986, 1987) and Weiner (1986).

## **Part 2: CONSTRUCTING A FEMINIST THEORY OF GENDER**

The formulation of a socialist feminist perspective encountered some early difficulties, not least its apparent failure to take seriously enough male power or patriarchal relations. Marxist feminist analysis in other parts of women's studies had come under fire by radical feminists such as Stanley and Wise (1983), for its inability to move beyond the boundaries of male concepts and male models of research and theorising. Such criticisms entered the educational world as well. Middleton (1984, p43) described the emergence of a socialist feminist tradition in the sociology of education, in which my work was located, thus:

*Socialist feminism has emerged from both a dissatisfaction with radical feminism's emphasis on description rather than explanation and a recognition that Marxism did not adequately explain the specific nature of women's oppression under capitalist patriarchy.*

However, despite ambitions to offer explanations for women's oppression, socialist feminists in education failed to convince radical feminists of their ability to deliver the goods. Pat Mahony (1985 p.69) for example criticised my work on precisely these grounds:

*...although MacDonald's work represents an advance because it considers girls at all and because it details certain aspects of schooling as expressive and reproductive of patriarchal relations, in the last analysis it is inadequate in stating that the material base of patriarchy is in the last instance reducible to the economic and in its claim that patriarchy is maintained solely in the interests of capitalism.*

Mahony, like other radical feminists, asked 'why do divisions within society such as the private/public division, or male and female segregation in the work force have to be sexual divisions and why do women have to be subordinate to men?' As a Marxist, I like Hartman, had given 'analytic primacy to the mode of production as ultimately determining social relations' but in doing so, we had never explained why or how men control women. While agreeing with me that patriarchy has its own material base, Mahony goes further to argue for the recognition of 'the material consequences to be found in instances of rape, male violence, sexual harassment - ways in which men control women'. And in answer to her question, 'why should working class men engage in practices which subordinate women for capitalism?', she replies 'men do so because they benefit from it' - a reality, she argues, omitted from my analysis of patriarchy.

Initially, the common cause which held together the field of gender and education (referred to earlier) had made it difficult for one radical perspective, particularly that of socialist feminism, to criticise another - that of radical feminism. Indeed Michele Barrett, a leading marxist feminist, in her chapter on education in Women's Oppression Today (Barrett 1980), relied indirectly on the insights of radical feminism as a means of reassessing Marxist categories - thus extending the socialist debate. It was unlikely that Barrett would accept the underlying theoretical premises of such radical feminist analysis. Yet despite differences in perspectives, the insights of radical feminists about male power in education fitted far better



into the framework of socialist feminism than did the approach taken by those concerned with sex-role stereotyping and socialisation.

However, as can be seen by Mahony's comments, the tension between arguments favouring capitalism or patriarchy as the power structure which had ultimate determining influence on female education was not easily resolved. At this point in time, the challenge for both radical feminists and marxist feminists was to consider how to combine an analysis of the unity of female experience with the problem of recognising the diversity of those experiences across social class (Acker 1987). The question at a concrete level was, how far did class position fracture the unity of women? Could one still talk about male dominance across social class divisions? Could one refer to the female experience in education? Such considerations had a major impact upon my thinking, encouraging me in the direction of strengthening the patriarchal analysis and distancing myself further from class reproduction theory.

However in writing Chapter 4, I had also become increasingly aware of the limitations of research being conducted within the framework of equal opportunities. The difficulties of putting together cultural and political economic analysis because of the contradictions between these two perspectives provided me with a new and fascinating set of problems. I had become concerned about the dominance of a liberal perspective with its somewhat simple theories of gender socialisation (18). On the one hand, there was a danger that we would repeat many of the mistakes we had seen in the context of social class in the 1970s - the belief in the autonomy of education, the effectiveness of school based reforms, and the possibilities by using teachers and the curriculum to produce major social change. On the other hand, the 'deficit' model of pupils was being used, yet again, to explain educational underachievement. Girls and female teachers were increasingly being characterised as 'the problem', the victims of their socialisation. Like Sharpe (1976), McRobbie (1978), Fuller (1980) and later Anyon (1983) whose theoretical roots lay in class analysis, I was also concerned at the political implications of presenting girls within a framework that defined them as passive victims of their education and their fates.



At the time, it seemed, that what was needed both to answer radical feminist criticisms and to challenge liberal theories of gender was a concept of male power within education. The next step was to develop a concept of male power that was (like class power) historically specific, forceful and yet not characterised as total domination or repression. I had already referred to Gramsci's concept of hegemony in the context of class relations but had not, at that stage considered patriarchy from this perspective. In 'Male Hegemony, social class and women's education' (Chapter 5), I introduced the concept of male hegemony into my analysis of education.

I saw the possibilities too of developing the concept of gender codes more fully especially in the context of the production (19) rather than the reproduction of gender differences. Acker (1981) had thought that the concept of gender codes potentially was one of the most fruitful on offer, yet it was clear that it required elaborating further. By combining concepts of gender code and male hegemony, the opportunity was there to discuss the relationship between the production of gender differences and the production of consent. Also I could talk about the possibilities of challenges to male hegemony or competing codes of meaning, and therefore begin to theorise gender conflict and struggle.

As far as I was concerned what was now needed was a theory of cultural production of gender which could extend the analysis of patriarchal capitalism. This theory would recognise the structural aspects of education (i.e. emphasising gender relations as classification systems), yet at the same time recognizing the active nature of learning and the points at which conflict and power struggles could occur. Bernstein's work also provided the timely reminder that the 'recognition of principles does not determine the realisation (i.e. practice), it can only set limits on it'. In both the concepts of gender codes and male hegemony, the possibilities were available not just for social reform but also for the creation of alternative principles, or counter hegemonies. This new article, perhaps even more than Chapter 1, was enthusiastically received by those working in sociology of education.

Although Connell (1987) was later to have reservations about such structural analyses, Kessler et al (1987, p224) reviewed it thus:

*The second important development has been the attempt to combine the analysis of gender, as a psychological and interpersonal matter, with an understanding of how a social order as a whole reproduces itself... As Burton (1975) argues 'this has been one of the key lines of development of feminist social theory in the last decade'. Interesting examples of this work are Chodorow's (1978) psychoanalytic sociology of gender... and Willis' (1977) account of masculinity among British working class youth. Arnot (1981b,1982) develops this line of thought in what is now the most sophisticated theoretical analysis of gender and education available.*

The usefulness of the concept of male hegemony in education can be seen most clearly in Weiler's (1987) research on women teachers working for a change. Here, she uses the concept to explain teachers' struggles to set up a counter-hegemony through feminist practice. Similarly Acker (1989 p310), in a recent study of British teachers and feminist politics, uses the concept of hegemony to ask 'how, when and why teachers do challenge the hegemony or conversely why so often they do not'.

The task of deconstructing and reassessing social reproduction theory proceeded with a new article on 'A feminist perspective on the relationship between family life and school life' (Chapter 6). I had become aware that the dichotomies between, for example, private/public, between family/work and their association with male/female divisions had shaped sociology of education itself, not just as I had argued in Chapter 3, the school curriculum. Such divisions were particularly evident in the political economy approach and its privileging of male spheres. As a result of using such classifications, female educational, family and work experiences and male private lives were excluded from a framework that almost exclusively concentrated on the public lives of men, especially in paid employment.



The way out of such constraining male definitions seemed to lie in breaking the boundary between family and work and of attempting to reintegrate these aspects of individuals' lives and their education. For example if patriarchy was to be considered seriously, then I (like David, 1980 and Shaw, 1981) had to build into the analysis, in a more sophisticated way, the possibilities of the family shaping the structure of schooling and the destination of both boys and girls. As the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies Education Group (1981) had argued - schools faced two ways, towards the economy and towards the family. Also, if I took more seriously the influence upon schooling of family forms, I would have to move away from the overriding interest in secondary education to the exclusion of primary education (20). This break with economic determinism and its interest in the transition from school to work represented another important shift away from the model of social reproduction developed in the 1970s. It also allowed for the possibility of conceiving differently the structuring of class and gender identities within schools.

The publication of what was to become a highly influential study, Making The Difference (Connell et al, 1982) bore close resemblance to my own thinking. Where I was developing concepts of bourgeois and male hegemony and gender codes, Connell et al talked about the 'hegemonising practices' of the school and 'gender regimes'. So similar were our concepts that some sociologists have collapsed the two sets together (Acker, 1988, 1989). Also the portrayal in this Australian research of the mediated relationship between the family and the school seemed to give substance to my earlier contention (Chapters 2 and 3) of the relationship between primary and secondary pedagogic work and the recontextualisation of gender.

Connell and his colleagues' research made it possible to weave new threads into the fabric of my analysis. I began to think in terms of 'gendered practices' - of the need to use particular concepts of masculinity and femininity that work in practice in the context of class membership. I argued that such gendered practices, developed within social and material constraints, were the forms of expression of particular sets of social relations and it was these practices that were recontextualised in the school. The school's definitions of gender,



therefore, might be constantly in tension with those of students' families, and students would have to act as, what I called 'go betweens', making sense of such 'hegemonising practices'. I felt that this analyses offered an improved understanding of the relationship between structure and agency, and of the complexity of class and gender relations.

Reintegrating family culture into the analysis of schooling also allowed for the possibility of exploring how girls' educational experiences differed by their social class origins. By constructing a typology of four different sets of educational patterns (and the contradictions within), I believed that a feminist theory of education could be developed, which combined the insights of socialist feminism but was not subsumed within it. This shift in approach did not go unnoticed. King (1987), for example, noticed that 'Neo-marxist explanations of sex-social class inequalities in education had begun to incorporate families in their analysis'. The stance represented by this new article (Chapter 6), King took to be a modification of my earlier strong political economy approach by the inclusion of the subjective interests of children and parents and a four-fold sex social class typology.

Somewhat tongue in cheek King adds in a footnote: 'It is tempting and gratifying to consider the change from MacDonald to Arnot to confirm Parkin's (1978) observation that 'inside every Marxist there seems to be a Weberian struggling to get out' (p299 ). The basis of this 'Weberianism', he argues, lies in the recognition of multi-causality and of the interplay between, as Collins (1977) put it, the 'subjective-idealist, materialist and structural levels of analysis (which) are not only not rivals, but none of them is an adequate explanation without the others.'

Whilst I cannot agree with King's summary of my work, especially the assumption that I had accepted the cultural perspective referred to in Chapter 4, I am happy to note the significance of bringing the family more sharply into focus. The importance of reintegrating the family into sociology of education had been signalled much earlier by David's (1978, 1980) work but, in rejecting Althusser's analysis early on (see discussion of Chapter 1 above), I had not appreciated the importance of the family-education couple. It had taken

me, and interestingly another socialist feminist Wolpe (1989) some years to break out of the constraints of political economy and to argue more strongly for the significance of family life.

By 1983, the context in which I had been working had undergone considerable change. Teachers were developing strategies to help girls improve their academic performance particularly in the sciences and mathematics. One strategy was to set up single sex classes for girls in mixed schools. The work conducted in such classes differed considerably in objectives and methods from those advocated by the radical feminists such as Spender and Sarah (1980) who had supported single sex education as valuable for feminist consciousness raising. The closure of single sex schools in the maintained sector had also added an urgency to this developing debate about the value of coeducation for girls.

In becoming aware of the public controversy surrounding coeducation and the arguments for single sex education, I was increasingly fascinated by the history of coeducation and its neglect by educational historians, critical sociologists and policy makers. From the work of, for example, Lavigneur (1980) and Shaw (1976, 1980), one could see that coeducation provided a particularly important example of how class and gender relations had in practice dovetailed together historically in educational provision. It offered therefore a fascinating case study to consider, given my theoretical perspective. Also as Shaw (1980) had argued, mixed schools were more likely to maintain the distinctiveness, the boundaries and the polarisation between the sexes - a view which resonated with my theory of gender codes.

In 'A cloud over coeducation .....' (Chapter 7), I tried to set the contemporary debate in its historical context, to identify the different ways gender relations might have been transmitted to members of different social classes through mixed and single sex schools. The analysis took the view that the 'sex structure' of the school was significant not because one was more 'liberating' than another, but because different types of school represented different ways of transmitting gender relations. I drew inspiration from Bernstein's (1977)



concept of 'modalities of transmission' as the key to such differences in educational provision for working class and middle class pupils. I was also helped by June Purvis' historical research (Purvis, 1981 a & b) on the education of working class girls and women in the nineteenth century. She had identified class specific notions of femininity and the dilution of middle class ideals for working class women. These ideals were particularly relevant to the various debates historically about the value of mixed schools and of gender differentiation in the secondary curriculum.

Such historical research challenged the assumptions concerning the communality of women's experiences. I argued that the unity of women's experiences, (upon which radical feminist analysis based their critique of coeducational schools), was premised on the 'myth of female classlessness'. There was a danger therefore that girls' education would be portrayed as having been shaped predominantly by a familial ideology or 'domestic education ideology' thus ignoring the different shape of gender relations prescribed for each social class and the different ways in which such gender relations were transmitted. Class differences were major factors in how girls experienced education, not just in terms of the provision of different curriculum but also of different types of school. Thus single sex education had become the flagship of the upper middle classes and their gender culture. Any discussion of the merits or disadvantages of coeducation would have to address this issue.

The arguments outlined in Chapter 7 were taken up by sociologists such as Kenway (1989) and historians such as Summerfield (1987) in studies of the very different contexts of private single sex schools in contemporary Australia and six Lancashire girls' schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The debate around coeducation and single sex schools continues to run (Deem, 1983) and similar conclusions seem to be reached in a number of empirical studies. They indicate that it is probably the type of school (for example, whether the school was a grammar, secondary modern or comprehensive), that matters more than whether it is mixed or single sex (Bone, 1983; Steedman, 1983; Mahony, 1985). The coeducation debate has also affected feminist thinking in a range of different countries (such as Germany, Sweden and New Zealand) and in Australia, Kenway and



Willis (1986) have shown, through their excellent summary of feminist controversies over coeducation, that the arguments I and others have made are also relevant to other national contexts (21).

One of the conclusions I reached in my analysis of the coeducational debate was the following:

*...what will we say about the education of boys? The feminist ideals for girls' education, of whatever variety, do not leave a clear strategy as to how to overcome male prejudicial attitudes to women. The question remains are patriarchal and sexist attitudes a female or a male problem? A separate strategy for one sex does not, in my view, challenge the overall reproduction of dominant gender relations.*

(Arnot, 1983, p87)

The consequences of coeducation for boys seemed a lost dimension of feminist analysis. It was, in fact, somewhat contentious to raise the problem of boys' education when the women's movement had defined itself as struggles for and about women. It was, therefore, with some hesitancy that I decided to take up the invitation to contribute an article on boys' education to R.Deem's edited collection on coeducation, designed for teachers. Although so many sociological studies of schooling had concentrated on boys' education (almost to the exclusion of girls), surprisingly there were at that time few studies of masculinity as a gender form (22). Similarly the men's movement had not had the same impact as that found in the United States with the result that 'men's studies' had not developed in any substantial way in Britain. I had therefore to discover what I could about masculinity and education from American sociological and educational studies and small journals produced by men's groups in Britain. This research provided interesting contrasts to British feminist perspectives since it referred to the potential discrimination against boys by teachers (a point picked out of the article later by Wolpe, 1988a). On the other hand, the range of material I was able to pull together for this article did not offer any coherent theory

of masculinity except in so far as it pointed to male psychological difficulties in being the 'oppressors' or in being especially exploited by capitalism as the primary wage earner in the family.

I found it useful therefore to continue with the concept of gender classification and to consider how boys might be taught the structural divisions between public/private, family/work and male and female worlds. Do boys have a different relationship to these divisions compared with girls? Also Hartley's (1959) and Chodorow's (1979) work suggested that boys not only learn such classifications but that they invest far more in them. They 'police the boundaries', pulling into line not only girls but 'weaker' boys, depending whether they are in mixed or single sex environments. Walkerdine's (1981) research in infant schools and Measor and Woods' (1984) investigations into the first years of secondary schools also illustrate how boys struggle to find their gender identity.

A number of new issues could be derived from this article. We could ask, for example, how the ideology of the male breadwinner (an often forgotten ideology) is shaped, and how this positions women at the same time as it narrows the horizons of men? We might also wish to reassess the notion of masculinity as a power base by considering how insecure a category it remains, with male dominance to be earned daily? Do we have to distinguish, as Segal (1989) recently argued, between masculinity and male dominance, between the psychologies of men and the social structures and ideologies of male dominance. In this early attempt to analyse masculinity and education I was beginning to come to the same conclusions as Segal, that the more we study masculinity as a gender form, 'the more the ideal attributes of masculinity collapse into their opposites, dominance into submission, authority into obedience, autonomy into dependence, strength into weakness' (Segal 1979, p15) - the more we become aware of the contradictions within masculinity.

What then are the implications for coeducational schools and for girls' education? I did not, as Wolpe recently argued (1989) see boys' sexism as the major problem for girls in mixed schools - but rather stressed the importance of studying gender relations, not female



educational experiences in isolation. I stressed the value of looking at different contexts in which gender relations are constituted and the different learning experiences of boys and girls. The most significant factor which had emerged from my analysis of coeducation in Chapters 7 and 8 is the importance of identifying the ideology of gender difference which is institutionalised either within separate schools or inside mixed schools. This ideology of gender difference, although often implicit, is key to whether the experience of education can be 'liberating' for either sex, rather than experienced as another form of social control.

The four articles contained in Part 2 of the thesis, although very different in style, audience and topic, represent an extension of the work represented in Part 1. I had tried to develop my early work on gender codes by incorporating theories of active learning, the production of gender differences and the processes involved in sustaining a male hegemony. I had continued the critique of class reproduction theory by challenging at a deeper level the sets of relations established between schooling, work and the economy. And I had tried to address the range of female and male educational experiences by considering the different ways in which class relations are structured for men and women. This objective involved addressing many more of the contradictions within the processes of gender formation, not merely its consistency.

Increasingly, however, I was turning my attention to the concerns of teachers (for example, when dealing with boys in schools or designing single sex classes in mixed schools). In the next section I shall show how this link with educational practitioners was strengthened. Interestingly the way in which contact with schools was facilitated was through working collaboratively with feminists on women's studies courses and feminist teachers on inservice courses on equal opportunities. Increasingly I was being drawn into the world of gender politics in schools and away from internal sociological debates in higher education. It was an experience that was not unique and which contributed valuable new insights into the ways in which gender relations in education could be understood.

### PART 3: INTERPRETING THE POLITICS OF GENDER REFORM

Between 1981 and 1983 I worked in an Open University course team constructing a course on 'The Changing Experience of Women'. We focussed the course on, among other things, women's roles within the family, their employment patterns, issues of sexuality and cultural images of femininity. A substantial part of this course, however, was the section on state policy, investigating ways in which the state has affected women's lives, whether in terms of constructing women's place within the home and confirming their financial dependency on men, or in terms of allowing women greater opportunities to break out of such moulds. Issues of taxation, social security, education and health provision were covered in this section, with attempts being made in each to recognise the contradictions that may occur within and between different state policies.

I had become particularly interested in developing an analysis of state provision in education, not least because of the failure of economic theories to account for the complexity of the history of education provision - the history of political struggles over and in education. The work of, amongst others, Finn, Grant and Johnson (1977), Dale (1981) and Apple (1982) pointed to the need for a theory of state in order to understand the shaping of educational provision, particularly in the context of class analysis and theories of monopoly capitalism. Such debates were rarely referred to explicitly in sociological studies of gender and education, although in other parts of women's studies especially those dealing with social policy, feminists had developed a critique of the state and, in particular, the welfare state (23).

In the conclusion of Class, Gender and Education (MacDonald, 1981), I had come to the view that, although we had developed a more sophisticated analysis of the relationship between women's education and work, it was unclear what the 'intervention of the state means in this area' (24). I had asked:



*Does state policy represent capital's interests and those of men, or does the state attempt to reconcile the interests of both? Or is the state an independent actor and arbiter in the conflict between the demands of the economy for female wage labour (albeit at low cost), on the one hand, and the expectations of men for their unpaid 'servicing' by womenfolk in the home, on the other? Alternatively, is the state a progressive force in so far as it can attempt to break down the more blatant aspects of sexual inequalities? ....there is still much more work to be done in accounting for the ideology and practice of the state in defining women's education.*

(MacDonald, 1981, p94)

Investigating the role of the state in women's education was particularly important if those committed to equal opportunities between the sexes were calling on central or even local government (i.e. local education authorities) to intervene and promote reform in this area. The state therefore was being asked to act as an agent of social change (25). I had already argued (in Chapter 4) that liberal theories of gender and education had failed to appreciate, it seemed, the action of the state in constructing gender divisions - what I called, following Bourdieu, a 'misrecognition of the action of the state'. An analysis of the state could provide a more realistic view of the possibilities of reform on the one hand, and on the other, it could reassess assumptions concerning the direct economic structuring of the educational system.

Unpopular Education (CCCS, 1981) had revealed the complexity of historical class struggles in shaping worker and citizen, the alternative educational models developed by the working classes and the ability of the state to compromise and create new 'settlements'. However by the early 1980s there were few examples of such analyses in terms of gender. David's Family, State and Education (1980) stood out as one of few comprehensive texts dealing with the history of the teaching profession, women teachers' struggles for recognition and the development of gendered curriculum policy. The account she offered identified the impact of particular economic and political conditions on gender issues, the

realities of resourcing education and the differing levels of pragmatism and hostility adopted to girls' education and women teachers' plight.

Other studies of state policy also suggested that the role of the state in shaping women's education was complex. The tensions between male and female teachers within teacher unions and between teachers and the state began to be explored in more depth (e.g. Oram 1987). More contemporary policy shifts in the way female education had been constructed were identified by Wolpe (1976). In her study of three government reports, she documented moves away from the Victorian model of male and female instincts and innate abilities to a new discourse of 'interests' and 'needs'. By the 1960's the provision of a 'female' curriculum was based on the principle of allowing girls the freedom to choose, according to their 'feminine' interests. Wickham (1987) extended our understanding of post war educational planning by looking at the ways in which training policy had been framed around male interests, especially around the pivotal concepts of 'skill' and 'vocationalism'.

Deem (1981), on the other hand, had shown the importance of identifying those aspects of state policy that were 'non-reproductive' and also, like David (1984, 1985), alerted us to the importance of relating educational policy to other social policies which influenced women's position, crucially in the family. Shaw (1981) also developed the analysis of the relationship between the family and the state in her exploration of how the state, through mass compulsory schooling was constructed 'in loco parentis', especially towards children of the working classes.

The focus of my unit for the Open University women's studies course Educating Girls (Arnot, 1983) was that of social change. Later updated and modified into, 'State education policy and girls' educational experiences' (Chapter 9), this article attempted to evaluate the impact of state education policy on women's lives. We had reached the point, I felt, when we needed to ask ourselves whether state education, in fact, had benefited the majority of girls. Or has it confirmed and legitimated women's status as second class citizens and low paid workers?



A number of reasons may be offered for why these questions were not often asked. Perhaps the difficulty of making such an assessment is the major one, but it also may have seemed politic to see central government in a positive light - especially if it were to be used as an agency of reform (eg Byrne, 1978). It was also difficult to analyse critically the maintained education sector at a point when it was already suffering major attacks by the Conservative government and morale amongst teachers was low.

What I hoped to do in this article was to describe a number of different ways in which such an assessment could be tackled. I attempted to provide a 'cook's tour' through the arguments concerning the nature of women's educational experiences, their qualifications, social mobility and employment patterns. Attempting to explain such patterns involved looking at the history of state educational provision and its legacy of a gendered curriculum, as well as the different levels of 'socialisation' revealed by gender studies - for example early childhood, educational organisation, mixed and single sex schooling and classroom practices. I used the theoretical framework already developed in previous articles to argue for the importance of considering the impact of state education on girls of different social classes and of analysing state education, not merely as a means of social control but also one potentially of liberation.

Clearly the expansion of state education meant more education for girls, even if the nature and content narrowed their horizons or did not compare that favourably with the education provided for boys. However, whatever the interpretation of the effects of schooling on girls' lives, it was increasingly clear that one could not easily sustain a view of the neutrality of the state. It had, in certain ways, attempted to maintain the sexual division of labour through educational provision, even if the success of that venture was a matter for debate.

The material collected together for this article challenged liberal theories of the state and the role of education in society. It implied a far greater role of the state in creating what feminists had identified as - the custom and convention of gender differentiation (embedded,

as it were, within a pattern of class differentiation). As a result classroom practice and the patterns of male and female interaction between teachers and students could be seen to be created by specific educational ideologies. Not all of these ideologies could be described as 'official ideologies'. Although gender had been used as one organising principle of educational provision (at least until the late 1960's), the research discussed in this article showed that other professional ideologies such as 'progressivism' (and even vocationalism) have also given gender differentiation space within schooling.

In this overview of state education policy, I hoped to show that cultural or sex-role socialisation theory needed to locate the gendered structures and interactive processes of school in their political and economic context and to recognise the existence of individual and collective female struggles for and in education. The project of just exposing the oppressive effects of sexism and the pervasiveness of cultural stereotypes seemed too limited a task in such a context.

The analysis of the politics of state intervention allowed me to consider not just past policy but also contemporary educational reforms. This was particularly appropriate since equal opportunities had begun to receive more official recognition, even if only at the level of lipservice. If the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 had been at all successful, its impact was generally felt in helping to create a new climate of opinion that gave limited recognition to concerns about girls' education. By the early 1980s, central government departments such as the DES and MSC/Training Commission and quangos such as the EOC, CRE and WNC had started to develop different approaches and strategies for equal opportunities, as had a range of local authorities and schools. In anthologies such as Weiner (1985), Whyte et al (1985), Arnot (1985) and Burchell and Millman (1989), the accounts written by teachers, equal opportunities advisors and inspectors, and academics involved in action research projects in schools reveal the increasing range of professional expertise developing around gender issues.



Yet no national picture was available to bring together such diverse policies and strategies. By the mid 1980's, we did not know whether different perspectives were being adopted or what the problems of implementation were. We did not know, for example, how and why certain local authorities had developed equal opportunities policies or guidelines and other had not. The Swann Report (DES, 1985) and major DES funded projects such as Eggleston et al (1986) had reported on the education experiences of ethnic minority pupils. Yet despite calls for an equivalent broad ranging overview for gender (26), there had been no official review of gender differentiation along these lines since the DES survey on curricular differences (DES 1975). As far as I was aware, the only national picture available on gender policy as late as 1985 was that presented by an 'insider' - the HMI Patrick Orr (1985).

As a result of my teaching commitments (Arnot 1986), I was encouraged to consider gender and education policy making. If sociology of education had not taken gender issues seriously, management and policy studies had paid even less attention to such issues. However, sociologists were beginning to offer their own forms of policy analysis which combined an interest in how particular issues come to be defined as problems and placed on the policy agenda, with a study of the 'solutions' found to alleviate such problems (Dale, 1981).

An analysis of the policy-making process offered new dimensions to the politics of schooling by encouraging an understanding of the duties, responsibilities and roles played by educational institutions, agencies and associations. A sociology of policy-making could illuminate the statutory constraints, the possibilities and powers of agents and agencies within the government of education (27) and thus, it seems, prevent the sorts of 'possibilitarianism', referred to earlier, which could be found in sociology of education in the 1970's.

However, despite such new sociological interest in educational policy-making, there were few examples of research on the government of education which brought issues of gender to the fore (Whyte et al, 1985 and Arnot, 1985 contained some of the few

contributions by practitioners in this area). In comparison, the area of 'race' was seemingly well provided for in the work, for example, of Young and Connelly (1981), Dorn (1983) and Troyna and Williams (1986). Such research filled a gap in our knowledge about the political struggles over educational policies on 'race' issues and the ways in which multicultural and anti-racist perspectives were being transformed in practice.

In the article 'Political lip-service or radical reform....' (Chapter 10) I intended to offer a comparable analysis to that of 'race' by investigating the role of central government in relation to gender. I wondered what lessons could be learnt from a study of gender issues, especially about the nature of policy making when a different pattern of social inequality was involved. In the future, I hope to bring together the different policy strategies on class, race and gender and learn how they interrelate in different economic and political climates.

In order to write this article, I had to pull together original documentation from the DES, MSC and EOC. I also interviewed a number of key individuals in central and local government in order to gain some perspective on equal opportunities policy development. Perhaps the most important conclusions that were reached in this article were, firstly, the fact that different strategies were being adopted by different central government agencies; and secondly (and perhaps more importantly), that a range of debates concerning equality of opportunity lay beneath the surface. The conflict between centralisation and local autonomy, between compulsion or freedom of choice, between universalism and positive discrimination have rarely been discussed in terms of gender, and yet they are clearly important (28).

One of my objectives in this article was to develop new research questions concerning state involvement in gender education. The more ambitious goal, however, was to help establish gender as a topic worthy of policy analysis, and therefore a legitimate part of any research and teaching on educational management. Despite the development of LEA policies, and even of a new career structure in local government - that of the equal opportunities advisor or inspector - gender education policy seemed to be marginal to the main policy concerns of the mid 1980s. After all, what relationship did it have to the main



priorities of a Conservative government committed to cuts in education expenditure, the introduction of teacher appraisal and pay-bargaining controls, and greater intervention into teacher education? Did the study of gender have anything to say about the changing role of LEA's and centre-local relations, the new financing of education and the changing role of school governing bodies? Gender issues, all too often, were being treated by sociologists and policy analysts as peripheral to such major political restructuring of education.

Yet a study of equal opportunities initiatives in the 1980s reveals precisely how far the tradition which focussed upon the unequal distribution of education and patterns of educational disadvantage still thrives despite these new priorities. As I argued earlier, many sociologists dated the final collapse of the social democratic consensus with the electoral success of the Conservative government (eg CCCS, 1981). The implication was that we were witnessing the demise of equality of opportunity as the dominant ideological thread of post-war policy. Yet in reality teachers, even under a Conservative government, have still been actively trying to find ways to maintain that tradition, against the odds, in their classrooms and schools. Ironically just when teacher-education over the last twenty years seemed to have had an impact in terms of promoting school equality policies, sociologists seemed to be losing heart. In looking at the collapse of concern over class inequality, they seemed unable to see the excitement and also the struggles that teachers, particularly in metropolitan areas, were engaged in.

Ironically, it was the intervention of the MSC and its funding criteria of 'promoting equal opportunities between the sexes' that catapulted gender into the world of 'serious' policy analysis. Now analyses of the 'new vocationalism' and new forms of 'categorical funding' (Harland, 1987) adopted by the MSC/Training Commission had to take notice of gender issues. Thus, the work of Millman (1985) and Weiner (1989a) on the contradictions between the vocationalism and equal opportunities ideologies became relevant to discussions, amongst academics and practitioners, about the implementation and impact of the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) (e.g. Dale, 1989).

For those interested in movements for social change, gender issues in education provides a fascinating area of research. School and LEA policies revealed a continuing commitment to teacher-based reforms in aid of social justice (Weiner, 1988). Teachers committed to equal opportunities between the sexes have struggled to design strategies for tackling not just girls' academic performance or subject choices, but also the 'whole school' - its staffing structure, organisation, curriculum content, teaching styles and forms of assessment. Although this grassroots teachers' movement has rarely received national recognition through, for example, DES priority funding for INSET provision, it has still managed to sustain itself, though often with difficulty, through individual initiatives and small projects. The danger, however, is that such initiatives leave no records. Ironically at a time when there seems to be increasing interest in recovering the history of female (and particularly feminist) teachers in teacher unions, contemporary struggles for social equality inside teacher unions and in schools seem to be in danger of being lost.

Weiner (1985) provided one of the first attempts to differentiate between the perspectives adopted by teachers working in this field. She divided teacher strategies into two groups which were labelled 'egalitarians, and 'feminists', supporting equal rights or anti-sexist (girl friendly or girl centred) education. The dichotomy, although causing difficulties to those who bestride both, was useful in identifying for the first time differences of approach. These approaches bore some resemblance to the academic feminist perspectives outlined earlier. In developing our Open University MA course Gender and Education, Weiner and I extended this classification of perspectives to include black feminism. We also recognised the need to publish a new updated account of teachers' projects and strategies.

In writing 'Teachers and gender politics' (Chapter 11) our objectives therefore were straightforward. We hoped to capture the flavour of the teacher-reform movement by drawing together the small and scattered accounts of school projects and schemes. We hoped to show some of the strengths and weaknesses of the British tradition of reform around equal opportunities and anti-sexism and to rectify the view that all such initiatives



originated from either centre or local government politicians and officials. This project seemed particularly appropriate at a time when teachers were under attack for their lack of professional competence and commitment. If there was one thing that was clear, teachers involved in such projects seemed to care far more deeply for their pupils than for their own time and energy.

This article goes some way toward addressing the criticisms made recently by Yates (1987) of 'reproduction theorists'. She argued that insufficient attention had been paid to the movement among teachers (e.g. non-sexist education) and that account had not been taken of struggles over the outcomes of schooling between opposing groups. Yates also questioned the role which seemingly 'radical' theorising had in relation to what she called such 'progressive action'. Feminist theory, she argues, should reduce the complexity of phenomena; draw attention to ways in which strategies may produce unintended consequences; and stimulate thinking about what other aspects of education or society would need to be changed, if desired ends of educational reform are to be met.

The criticism she makes of socialist feminist analysis is that, while it fulfils these functions well, it appears to be only indirectly connected to what teachers might do. Although it might help teachers understand gender relations better and suggest limits to action, Yates argues that without a connection to the anti-sexist education movement, the sorts of critical consciousness raising of the sort provided by socialist feminists about the nature of patriarchy and capitalism cannot, of itself, produce 'transformed outcomes for women'.

I was fortunate enough to be able to develop just such connections between theory and practice, between academic and practitioner knowledge, by taking up the invitation I received to help run an in-depth inservice course on gender issues for the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA). The course was part of the Equal Opportunities Inspector's programme to promote a deeper understanding of gender issues, particularly since many ILEA teachers were politically sophisticated and experienced feminists. The project raised some fascinating

issues, not least the usefulness of my theory of gender and class relations in the context of teacher-research.

The project was initially written up as a manual for inservice workshops for all ILEA secondary schools (Adams and Arnot, 1986). It contained the discussion papers and project ideas used on the course, and the accounts written by teachers of the projects they had undertaken on the course. In 1988, I was asked to analyse my experience on the course for P.Woods' edited collection on teacher development. This context was a new one and led me to consider what lessons could be learnt from equal opportunities projects about the personal and professional dimensions of teachers' lives. In the article 'The challenge of equal opportunities....' (Chapter 12 ), I argued that it was the theory of gender used in the course to structure the activities and discussion which made it possible to consider both teacher's biographies and pupil's lives from the same perspective - that of the production and negotiation of gendered identities. In the projects set up by teachers on the course, one can also find the impact of concepts such as gender codes and pupil mediation of family and school cultures, the production of definitions of femininity and how this shapes girls' responses to school.

The use of such theory to design school-based investigations revealed precisely what Yates had argued for - the possibilities and limits of action. It also challenged, one hopes, the 'deficit' model of girls referred to earlier. Further it suggested ways in which sociology of education could be made more directly useful to schools through such inservice courses. Although I had had no direct connection with other sociologists working with teachers in schools, my work on this course had, as Woods (1989) pointed out, many similarities with other projects involving teacher development. If sociologists and teachers, he argues, have in common 'the improvement of education' and can seize the new opportunities provided, for example, by LEA funding or support from headteachers, then such joint enterprises are possible. The project described in Chapter 12 exemplified, for Woods, how commitment to equal opportunities could overcome some of the major obstacles of such collaboration -



especially that of relating theory to practice and of breaking down institutional separateness. Woods (1989a, p10) argues,

*Where (collaboration) works, it is a tribute to the professionalism of both sides, reflected in their ability to recognise these structures and their own relationship to them, and to rise above them. Only then can the critical edge of sociology, wherein lies its radical promise, become formative, that is, part of the teachers' own constructions, rather than being seen as undermining them.*

If the course was a success in terms of teaching strategy, it nevertheless could not avoid running into some difficulties. These difficulties were precisely to do with what was meant by a commitment to 'equal opportunities' since, as it became clear during the course, participants did not always share the same definition of that concept. The most significant differences in perspective were those concerning the relationship of gender and 'race' in anti-sexist work. The experiences described in Chapter 12 resonated with the criticisms of white feminist perspectives in the academic world. For example, Madan Sarup had criticised marxist feminism, arguing that it was 'not only irrelevant to black women but actually excludes them.' (Sarup, 1986). Challenging authors such as David, Deem, Wolpe and I, Sarup used the early work of black feminists to outline a number of criticisms of reproduction theory. Such criticisms became particularly significant in relationship to the development of anti-sexist education and were brought to the fore in the ILEA context by black feminist teachers.

A range of black feminists' critiques are now available and these have had considerable impact in terms of shifting the agenda in women's studies (29). Courses and publications within women's studies have begun to take seriously the charges of white ethnocentrism and to consider the ways in which they are involved in the construction of a white Western feminist discourse. This analysis was personally relevant when the ethnocentrism of Weiner and my two edited collections (Arnot and Weiner, 1987; Weiner and Arnot, 1987) were reviewed by Brah (1988). The new project for those involved in gender issues in education,

therefore, is not just one of relating theory to practice, but of reassessing existing theory from a black perspective, and developing a synthesis between anti-racism and anti-sexism.

The four articles contained within Part 3 of this thesis represent therefore a major shift in the project of developing a theory of class and gender relations in education. The emphasis on educational policy and practice, rather than sociological theory reflects the political context in which these articles were written. In some ways this context provided one of the most exciting environments for the study of gender and education, since it was a time in which equal opportunities policies and initiatives were being developed, particularly at school and LEA level. The intervention of feminist politics into municipal socialism had brought with it new opportunities for consultation and policy formulation (Harriss, 1989). However, such opportunities were often short-lived especially given the effects of the Conservative government's policy of rate capping and the resulting cuts in educational expenditure. Equal opportunities issues are being pushed, yet again, to the sidelines. The new context for gender work in education has now been provided by the introduction of the National Curriculum and of national assessment and testing, signalling a very different era from that of the early 1980s. Now equal opportunities initiatives will have to be part of a philosophy of education 'in the market place', with its emphasis on consumer choice, 'delivery' of a standard curriculum, and competition between schools. The challenge will be to see whether equal opportunities as an ideology can survive the Education Reform Act 1988 and how it will be affected by the new structures of financial management in schools, greater parental power and more centralised control of the curriculum. It is on this project that I am currently engaged (Arnot, 1989 and 1990).



### (c) FEMINIST THEORISING

One of the major purposes of my work over the last ten years has been to integrate feminist and mainstream sociological theories. Initially I was particularly concerned about the neglect of feminist issues in sociology of education and, in particular, in reproduction theories. I had heard a range of arguments justifying such neglect - from accusations of lack of theoretical or empirical sophistication in feminist academic work (which so often meant a failure to use the same categories and concepts appropriate for male educational analysis), to arguments about feminist researchers' narrow focus on 'minority' issues (i.e. female education) (30).

Any body of academic work can be found wanting in some respect and feminist research suffered perhaps from such marginality. At times it appeared so separate a line of research that it seemed not to have addressed the lessons learnt from 'mainstream' sociology of education. It was almost as if those of us in gender and education research had to make the same theoretical mistakes as previous generations of sociologists concerned with class and education (Culley and Demaine, 1983). The generalisability of empirical findings from such research was also an issue since feminist researchers have often had to resort to small local studies of individual schools or classrooms or of groups of girls (31). There have been few larger scale studies - for example the GIST action research project (Kelly et al 1984) and the ethnographic research of Lyn Davies (1985), Sue Lees (1986) and Christine Griffith (1985), but they have been the exceptions. Often the analyses and insights of feminist researchers were based upon postgraduate dissertations and written up for edited collections or journals where it was considered important, at least by the 1980s, to have one article on gender and education. Further, because of a desire to address an audience of serving teachers rather than academic sociologists of education, reporting of the research methodology and the context in which the research was conducted sometimes has not been very specific. The desire of some feminists to challenge the concept of positivist social scientific research in much the same way as other 'qualitative' research has in the sociology of education tended to make their research controversial. Indeed the discussions

surrounding feminist research methods and whether one should construct a specifically feminist methodology has provided some of the most interesting and lively debates in women's studies (e.g. Stanley and Wise, 1983; Culley and Portuges, 1985; Harding, 1987).

However, the justifications for neglecting or indeed excluding feminist research from educational studies has often had more to do with maintaining an existing agenda than with the quality of the research itself. Whatever the limitations of feminist educational research - limitations that could often be found in other types of empirical research - the findings are sufficiently of interest, I would argue, as to justify a place in the sociological domain. By its nature, feminist work raises questions and provokes discussion about the adequacy of existing understandings of education. It provides 'glimpses' of social processes and structures in education which require further investigation. Feminist analyses of education whether of classrooms, curriculum, school organisation or teachers' work represent, I feel, the best of a tradition of 'exploratory' investigations, re-evaluating existing theories and conceptual models and constructing new agendas for the field.

Clearly there were also problems associated with the early formulations of feminist theories of education (some of which I have discussed above), but these were no different from the problems facing political economy, cultural reproduction theory or the sociology of schooling. The problems of, say functionalism in socialist feminist work, identified by Culley and Demaine (1983) were the same as those faced by many other authors (eg Bowles and Gintis, 1979). However it was unlikely that even Culley and Demaine's article would be referred to in the texts of well known critical theorists. Indeed if Acker (1981) were to update her analysis of sociology of education textbooks and journals, she would not find that much has changed. Sociology of education is still dominated by the concerns of male educational experiences. With notable exceptions such as the British Journal of Sociology of Education, most education journals have played little part in promoting feminist educational research in Britain. It is significant that, in 1989, a separate journal Gender and Education was felt to be necessary as an outlet for the wealth of national and international material in this area. Some textbooks on sociology of education, even with updating and revisions,



have still left feminist sociological work on the margins of the discipline. (see, for example, Reid, 1986) Critical theory in education, in particular the sociology of the curriculum and the politics of schooling has also marginalised feminist concerns (see Demaine, 1981, Apple, 1982, Giroux, 1983 and Dale, 1989). Whitty (1985) for example, offers a limited three pages on race and gender in his book on school knowledge (a major interest of feminist researchers), even though he acknowledges that developments in the theory of curriculum as ideological practice have been influenced by 'a growing recognition that the cruder forms of neo-marxist theory, even of the structuralist variety, were unable to deal adequately with the theorisation of gender and race' (p 53). Nevertheless Whitty offers no analysis of gender or 'race' theory and education.

Feminists have sought to reveal the mutual theoretical relevance of gender studies to mainstream sociology of education and educational policy in a variety of different ways. For my own part, rightly or wrongly, I felt the best strategy was to begin by assessing existing accounts of schooling using the 'insights' of feminist research. Formal recognition of the importance of such gender issues would, I believed, result from the successful development of a theory of gender and class relations. This theory would provide the conditions under those concerned with various social inequalities, such as class and gender, and the politics of schooling could unite. As Sarup (1986) pointed out, at that stage I, like so many other sociologists, did not take race relations into account. Nor, it must be said did I take account of the strength of indifference to gender issues in the discipline itself (a naivety which many other feminists were to experience - see for example David's (1987) account of becoming a feminist sociologist).

The project I was engaged in was also guided by other considerations that had more to do with the role of feminist theory as part of a political movement for change. Acker (1987, p421) uses the concept of feminist theory to refer to:

*...perspectives which guides one's search for answers to a central series of questions and dilemmas about sex and gender. Feminist theoretical frameworks*

*address, above all, the question of women's subordination to men: how this arose, how and why it is perpetuated, how it might be changed and (sometimes) what life would be like without it..... Feminist theories serve a dual purpose, as guides to understanding gender inequality and as guides to action.*

Such a concept of feminist theory involved extending beyond empirical research which focussed on describing the experiences of girls and women in education. Without answers to the questions 'why' rather than 'how', could we formulate 'guides to action'? Indeed, as I understood the nature of feminist politics, there was a need to challenge the liberal view that gender issues were solely an educational problem to which an educational solution could be found (see Chapter 4). The tradition of critical theory and political economy had revealed, if anything, the importance of the searching for historical patterns, political ideologies and economic conditions behind any educational formation.

What Acker identified as a need to generate 'guides to action', Bunch (1983) saw as the *raison d'être* for feminist theory. Feminist research by definition, she argued, could not be the 'unengaged study of women'. It is part of an attempt to formulate the 'general goals of sexual politics': it constitutes, 'an effort to bring the insights from the (women's) movement and from various female experiences together with research and data gathering and to produce new approaches to understanding and ending female oppression.' (Bunch, 1983, p 250)

Bunch distinguishes usefully between four stages of constructing theory - the processes of description, analysis, vision and strategy. If the first two parts of this thesis represent the early stages of description and analysis, then the third part represents a move towards outlining the possibilities of relating strategies to vision. Initially, I tried to understand the factors which limit equal opportunities practice and the nature of gender reform; latterly I tried to develop a particular strategy myself within the context of inservice work with teachers. Even though the distinction between these four stages is perhaps a



forced one, I think it is useful to look briefly at these different aspects of theory construction in the development of gender studies and the shaping of my own work.

## Description

By the time I began writing in the area of gender and education, the task of describing patterns of female education and employment was well under way. The collection of statistics by the Labour Party (see Rendel, 1986) provided a key impetus for the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, as did the HMI survey on curriculum differentiation (DES, 1975). Two other key texts on women and education by Byrne (1978) and Deem (1978) made public important information about teachers and pupils and their education careers, staffing structures, curriculum choices, performance etc. Patterns of sexual inequality were clearly revealed in such texts and in the statistical information provided by central government and teacher unions (32).

Historical research on female education had also begun to be developed by the late 1970s, describing and analysing the patterns of gender and class differentiation in elementary and secondary schools and higher education. Feminist historians have exposed the historical origins of contemporary patterns of gender relations in education (33). The project of 'making women visible' outlined by Rowbotham (1973) seems especially appropriate for the sphere of educational research.

In the last ten years, however it has also been particularly interesting to observe the growth of feminist ethnographic research. This has drawn strength from the concern of the women's movement to uncover women's subjective experiences (the personal is after all political). Qualitative methods of educational research were attractive for such a political project, not least because they demanded in-depth research and involved talking to female pupils or teachers directly. For studies of gender expectations and ideologies of sex differences, the advantages of delicately questioning pupils and teachers, whose trust had

been won over time, were seen, by some, as clearly greater than the 'objective' and often distorting impact of attitudinal questionnaires (34).

Initially, the concept of the 'hidden curriculum' had been developed and 'owned' by Marxist theorists of education. Yet this concept was increasingly to be used to describe the gendered organisation of schooling. The early work of, for example, Wasserman (1974) and Frazier and Sadker (1973) in the United States had focussed on the 'hidden' processes of schooling, especially the sexism found in educational institutions. In Britain the empirical research of, for example, Clarricoates (1978,1980), Buswell (1980), Stanworth (1983) and Davies (1987) contributed greatly to our understanding of the more subtle aspects of English schools and colleges and the ways in which pupils inhabited such institutions.

## Analysis

The primary goal of describing female education, on occasion, has relegated to secondary status the task of developing new analytic frameworks. On the whole, gender studies has sought to 'fill gaps in knowledge' or 'reassess and interpret existing data and findings' - two at least of the functions of feminist research identified by Acker (1981). These aims have been linked to a desire to develop strategies as quickly as possible rather than go the way of class studies, which, particularly by the end of the 1970's, seemed to have become too embroiled in abstract intellectual arguments about the nature of class relations and their effect on education. In contrast, there is an urgency about gender and educational studies that derives in part from the anger of the women's movement in having waited so long for signs of a commitment to sex equality. This sense of urgency results from the economic conditions that prevail, making it a favourable time to try to improve women's access to skilled and scientific professions, because of the shortage of such labour. In part too, the urgency also derives from the commitment of teachers to this issue and their calls for useful resources, guides and strategies for action. If teachers, rather than other academics, are the audience (the 'consumers' of such research), then theorising may seem perhaps to take too long a time and to bear little relevance to the daily concerns of



practitioners. The desire to prevent new generations of pupils being channelled into narrow conventional routes and the enthusiasm of feminist teachers have all encouraged a practical approach. The development of theoretical concepts and models may, in this context, seem an abstract and seemingly elitist activity more appropriate to higher education than to schools. Indeed existing theoretical perspectives, especially Marxism, had also received considerable criticism for their 'intellectualism' and distance from the concerns of the women's movement, a criticism accepted and reflected on by some marxist feminists (35).

Connell (1989, p38) argues that it has never been clear 'what kind of theory would be adequate to understand the world of sexual politics' - the starting point, therefore, should be to 'reconsider the foundations of the theories on offer'. I too, took this route beginning in effect with class analyses of education. Others such as Davies (1984), Griffith (1985) Lees (1986) and Wolpe (1989) have also attempted to reassess existing theoretical frameworks, such as deviancy theory, youth cultural studies or political economy. Describing the work of feminists involved in what I called the 'sociology of women's education', I argued that:

*...the pressure which this research exerts upon existing accounts of schooling takes the form of demanding recognition for the ways schooling constructs, modifies and transmits specific definitions of gender and gender relations to each new generation, within and across class boundaries. The challenge inherent in these analyses is to reassess current explanations of schooling which have glossed over and ignored the existence of the sexual division of labour within the school and its impact in determining the relations between the family, schooling and the labour processes.*

(MacDonald, 1980, p13)

Engaging with existing theoretical frameworks for the purpose of developing new ones is a hazardous exercise, not least because it can trap one precisely into using the same questions, concepts and categories. From a radical feminist perspective, it is this failure to

escape male defined categories and domains of thought which limited the usefulness of socialist feminist theory for the women's movement (e.g. Mahony, 1985).

Some of the ways in which such categories and relations constructed by existing theory can be challenged is through critical evaluation of the concepts, by collecting new data or by synthesising a range of information and evidence. In developing my analysis of gender and education, I have collected original research data on, for example, the history of coeducation, and government policy (particularly for Chapters 7 and 10). I have also used reports written by teachers involved in school projects (Chapters 11 and 12) and have drawn on cross cultural comparisons by using the work of gender researchers from a range of different countries (e.g. UK, USA, Canada, Norway, Australia and New Zealand).

The development of theory is a dynamic and uneven process. Over the course of ten years, I have not attempted to provide a comprehensive study of female educational experiences but I have tried to introduce new questions and to broaden the debates on the gendered nature of schooling. Often it was impossible to do justice to the empirical research collected by others in the field, or indeed to tackle effectively some of the limitations of each piece of research. When one is providing an overview, there is a danger of over-simplifying the research data, of selecting only the most spectacular of results. An overview has a limited purpose - which has to do with acting as a springboard for further thought.

The main objective of my work therefore has been the framing of a problematic. I, like others, have tried to make sense of the wealth of new evidence collected by researchers and to challenge taken for granted conceptions about the role of education in our society. Whilst others have challenged the teachers' interpretation of schooling, I have tried to challenge sociologists' interpretation of the impact of schooling. I have sought to uncover the interconnections between class, gender and latterly race relations, especially in terms of the relationship between schooling and society.



## Vision and Strategy

The development of strategy (and indeed vision) cannot be divorced from the material and ideological structures in which we ourselves work. For example, the choices available to sociologists in terms of strategy, on the one hand, have been shaped by the momentum of the academic discipline, and on the other, by political forces often beyond our control. For example, the changing role of sociology in relation to teachers and teacher education has had considerable impact on redefining the purposes of sociological analysis and research (Woods and Pollard, 1988). Also the effect of New Right educational philosophies on, for example, the changing relations between central and local government and the reform of the school curriculum, teacher employment and parental involvement cannot but change sociologists' perception of their role within the educational world and what constitutes appropriate and 'relevant' research.

My project, as I have shown, has undergone a number of shifts in the course of the last ten years. The trajectory which I took started with class analysis, then moved to gender studies and then towards developing feminist practice. It represents a pattern not dissimilar from that taken by others in the field. David (1987), for example, in describing her academic biography uses Eichler's (1986) distinctions between different approaches to feminist work. Moving through the 'business as usual' approach in which feminist issues have little place, David found herself using the 'liberal approach' where existing theoretical frameworks are reanalysed to see if they could incorporate women, even if only marginally. Finally, there was a choice between the 'women-centred' approach which encourages the separate development of feminist studies and the 'non-sexist approach' which investigates, for example, how society came to be 'sexist' and suggests ways forward that do not discriminate against either sex. David quotes Eichler (1984, p144-5) as seeing the most hopeful feminist project in one which associates

*feminism with the liberating traditions of Western thought... tending in the direction of greater equality... but transforming... them with women centred*

*values of nurturance and intimacy, as necessary and legitimate goals of political life.*

(quoted in David, 1987, p289)

The impetus to move forward from one approach to another was not purely a matter of personal choice. Working as a sociologist on gender issues from 1979 to 1989, I experienced increasing pressure to make my work more relevant to the concerns of practising teachers. At the same time, there was the shift in the women's movement towards an 'active politics' that responded to the changing political climate, especially the Conservative government's restructuring of the Welfare State (for a discussion of this shift see, for example, Feminist Review, 1989). My most recent concerns have therefore been to consider what strategies for change were possible given the structure, ideology and powers of central and local government (and the poor representation of women and feminist issues in those spheres). At a practical level, the task was to offer courses for student teachers and practitioners which would help them discover the sorts of policies that could be developed in educational institutions and be aware of the limits and possibilities of gender reform in education. Also by assessing how far educational policy-makers have taken into account issues of gender, and the assumptions behind equal opportunities and anti-sexist initiatives, I felt it would be possible to find new ways of working with other progressive movements such as those campaigning for racial, sexual and social class equality.

Although, as an academic, it is difficult to engage in constructing what Bunch called the 'vision' - indeed it would go against the principles of the women's movement (as well as anti-racist and socialist movements) with its concerns for cooperative and democratic modes of working to design a programme of action for schools. Nevertheless it did seem possible to investigate ways of discovering that vision. Working directly with teachers encouraged me to formulate an appropriate teaching strategy for what one might call 'anti-sexist consciousness raising'. Although there has been so little discussion in Britain about what would constitute feminist pedagogy, certain traditions, such as that of teacher as researcher, were being developed by the mid 1980's, particularly in inservice courses (Millman and



Weiner, 1985; Weiner, 1986b; Millman, 1987). The advantages of such an approach could be found in breaking down the hierarchies between theory and practice, between academic and teacher and between teacher and pupil (especially if the research involved pupil participation). Further it allowed teachers to generate and 'own' knowledge about schooling and to become confident in their own expertise. With such a 'constructivist' concept of teachers' knowledge, Woods (1986) argues that one can ground theory in the everyday concerns of schools. The model of change is essentially 'bottom up', where problems and issues develop out of the practitioners' world, even if frequently ambiguous and inconsistent.

This emerging tradition, as Woods described it, of teacher development is often informed by interactionist theory and by ethnographic methodology (also characteristic of the strategy we used on the ILEA course). Interestingly this model of collaborative research has much in common with Paulo Freire's (1972) approach to critical pedagogy as well as showing similarities with feminist pedagogies. One of the key aspects of these approaches is that of ensuring collaboration between all participants, where the tutor becomes in effect one of the learners (or the researcher one of the participants). This is precisely the principle which characterises Paulo Freire's concept of dialogical education where a circle of learners is created. It also has much in common with Belenky et al (1986)'s concepts of the 'midwife teacher' and 'connected teaching'. Here the teacher allows knowledge to be 'born' in a supportive environment, to be evoked, shared, confirmed in the practical, grounded world of every day life. Again we find an emphasis on the role of participant observation, and of developing a 'holistic' approach to personal and professional issues. This feminist strategy, which fits well with the new concerns of teacher development described by Woods, is one where,

*...educators can help women develop their own authentic voices if they emphasise connection over separation, understanding and acceptance over assessment, and collaboration over debate; if they accord respect to and allow time for the knowledge that emerges from first hand experience, if instead of*

*imposing their own expectations and arbitrary requirements they encourage students to evolve their own patterns of work based on the problems they are pursuing. These are the lessons we have learned in listening to women's voices.*

(Belenky et al., 1986, p229).

The concepts of 'teacher-centred' learning (Woods 1989), 'connected teaching' (Belenky et al 1986) or 'dialogical education' (Freire 1972) clearly involve some vision of promoting change. In the context of collaborative research, it is the teacher who acts as the agent of change. What is interesting, therefore, for sociologists are the ways in which teachers respond to gender issues and how and why they become involved in promoting change. The recent work of Joyce (1987), Acker (1988) and Riddell (1988) seem important here as indicators of the strengths and limitations of such critical pedagogic strategies.



## (d) CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIELD

During the period 1978 to 1989, I was not alone in trying to unravel the relationship between class and gender relations in education. I was able to locate my publications in a larger body of work which used a political economy perspective. This perspective has now been recognised as one of the major strands within the sociology of women's education. Generally, descriptions of this tradition have referred to the early work of Deem (1978, 1980), David (1978, 1980), Wolpe (1976, 1978) and Barrett (1980) as well as my own (Chapters 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6). Recent attempts to classify feminist perspectives such as those by Middleton (1984), Arnot and Weiner (1987), Acker (1987) and Kenway (1988) have outlined the same key features of what they have variously described as 'socialist feminism', 'feminist reproduction theory' or 'marxist feminism' (36). Since I have played a part in constructing this perspective, first I would like to assess the contribution of socialist feminism to the study of gender and education.

The central question which differentiates socialist feminism, on the one hand, from liberal or radical feminism, and on the other, from classical marxism and marxist theories of education is the one initially asked by Barrett (1980): how is education related to the reproduction of gender divisions within capitalism? If one wanted to identify the most important characteristics of the socialist feminist project we might, like Middleton (1984), identify the two goals of (a) examining the role of schooling in the creation and reproduction of class and gender relations and (b) developing an educational 'praxis'. The first goal represents a critique of radical feminism and its assumptions concerning the universal oppression of women by men. An alternative view is achieved by locating 'historically and empirically the complex linkages between class, gender and education' (Kenway 1988). Socialist feminism also seeks to challenge what it has identified as the inappropriate assumptions of liberal feminists about the role education could play in promoting social reform. At the same time, it has stressed the importance of developing anti-sexist policies and critical pedagogies in education - a paradox it has clearly not resolved.

In our review of socialist feminism, Weiner and I identified three related characteristics which mark out the terrain:

- (a) a concern with class relations and class differences between women and men;*
- (b) a wish to identify the historical and cultural forms that gender relations can take*
- (c) a concern with understanding the material basis of the education system in such a way that gender relations in education are linked to the sexual division of labour both in the family and in the labour process...*

(Arnot and Weiner, 1987, p51)

As a group of writers, Barrett, Deem, David, Wolpe and I had much in common. Although we have each chosen our own routes to achieve these aims and have been influenced by a wide range of debates, nevertheless we could be said to share the same theoretical framework and tradition of critical analysis. As a result, our work has been challenged on similar grounds. Culley and Demaine (1983), for example, have argued that feminist reproduction theory faces the same problems as class reproduction theory. Society, they argue, is represented as 'a field of play of pre-given and essential interests and needs' (p70) which leads to problems of what they called the 'over-determinism' of the education system by the economy. If class reproduction theory is the basis of feminist theory, then there is also a danger of assuming a functional fit between education and, in this case, capitalist patriarchy. The implications of such functionalism are found in the failure to tackle adequately the existence of conflict and contradiction between patriarchy and capitalism as two separate power structures. King (1987, p289) takes Deem (1978) and I (MacDonald, 1981) to task for not recognising that the presence of class and gender divisions found in non-capitalist societies contradicts our basic thesis that 'the sex-differentiated education-work homologue is a feature of capitalism.' He argues that we failed to demonstrate that class and gender differences in education are 'either particular to capitalism or take a particular form under capitalism'.



Other related criticisms of socialist feminism, as I have shown, have been concerned with the narrow understanding of capitalist formations themselves. Black feminists such as Carby (1982) and Brah (1988) have urged the importance of recognising, not just the impact of imperialism and Britain's colonial past on gender and class relations, but also the effect these traditions have in shaping the ethnocentrism and indeed, the racism, of the Women's Movement itself. One could argue, as does Connell (1987 p23), that 'all social scientific theories of gender are a Western invention....and definitely a modern one'. Within socialist feminist perspectives on education, the concept of the family as a white patriarchal household, the analysis of class and gendered cultures, educational experiences and the relationship between education and employment fail to tackle the complex interweaving of race with class and gender relations (37). Brah (1988, p119), in her review of Weiner and Arnot (1987), indicates the complexity of analysis still to be developed:

*...racist discourses homogenise white women's sexuality at the same time as they fracture it across class. The white working class woman is also represented as the 'carrier of the race' but is constructed as prone to 'degeneracy' because of her class background. Class contradiction is thus 'resolved' ideologically through 'race' and via gender subordination.*

Another major challenge to socialist feminist perspectives in education, already discussed in relation to my articles, has been mounted by radical feminists. Here the charge is the failure to 'do justice to the myriad ways men hold power over women, through control over sexuality and the threat of violence' (Acker, 1987). The conflict between cultural and economic theories of women, between perspectives which stress the importance of the personal, the private and the subjective worlds which women inhabit and those which emphasise the material conditions which underlie social relations within a system of economic production has been fought in many different disciplines (c.f Segal, 1987). In the study of education, radical feminists have developed considerable insight into the sexual politics of daily life in educational institutions and the male monopolization of culture,

knowledge and the government of education (Acker, 1987). The neglect of these areas by socialist feminism is explained by its alleged failure to overcome its androcentrism - a result of the continued use of marxist categories and problematic. Were socialist feminists too eager to make alliances with the male Left? Were the 'linguistic and logical contortions required to reconcile marxism with feminism' too high a price to pay?

Such criticisms of socialist feminist perspectives in education were not dissimilar to those found in the women's movement more generally. The history of socialist feminism since the 1960s has been well documented (38), with the most recent accounts (e.g. Segal, 1987; Feminist Review, 1989) able to outline key stages in the development of socialist feminist thought and practice. These are identified as, first, building associations with the Left movement, then tackling Marxism itself and considering the applicability of its categories for the study of women. It was in this period that the domestic labour debate assumed such importance. However, facing criticisms for its failure to analyse adequately the oppression of women and for its abstract, difficult, and some would say, alienating language, socialist feminism, like other sections of the Left, experienced increasing fragmentation and disarray. For some, the route forward involved developing what was called 'post-structural' analyses. This focussed less on the impact of the social structure on gender relations than on the ways in which the category 'woman' was constructed through various discourses, language and culture (39).

Also, the urgent need to take account of the nature of black women's and lesbians' experiences and their particular forms of oppression brought with it an era of 'identity politics' (Feminist Review, 1986), and a new interest in the 'politics of diversity' and 'gender difference'. The resulting shift from 'total politics' to 'identity politics' indicated, for some, a significant loss of unity in the women's movement, especially amongst socialist feminists (40).

By the end of the 1970's, national campaigns and conferences were being abandoned and, increasingly, it seemed that socialist feminism had lost its force as a political movement.



For many activists, the collapse of confidence and morale with the election of a Conservative government in 1979, the economic recession with its impact on female employment and the cutting back of the Welfare State with major implications for women signalled a new era. Many socialist feminists were to move into the mainstream of political life and to become active in local community struggles (Harriss 1989). Such work, however, did not facilitate a coherent political ideology and instead brought to the fore competing interests between different groups of women. Some were to argue that the 1980's has witnessed a period when the 'hierarchies of oppression' seemed more important than the formulating of a common purpose (Parmar 1989). In summing up the last decade, the editors of *Feminist Review* argued: 'Currently some of us are very conscious that socialist-feminism is regarded by many as a dead political perspective, and a label that was attached to a particular current in the women's liberation movement of the 1970's...' (*Feminist Review*, 1986, p4)

It had become clear that, as Segal (1989) argued, feminist politics formulated at the end of the 1960's cannot 'in unchanged form' provide a blueprint for the late 1980's. On the one hand, new alliances between progressive movements framed around class, sexuality and race needed to be forged, and on the other, new ways of conceiving of identity needed to be developed. The directions which the latter project might take have been indicated, for example, by Stuart Hall (1987, p.45)

*It seems to me that it is possible to think about the nature of new political identities, which isn't founded on the notion of some absolute, integral self and which clearly cannot arise from some fully closed narrative of the self. A politics which accepts the 'no necessary or essential correspondence' of anything with anything... and there has to be a politics of articulation.*

(Hall, 1987, p45)

The concept of 'articulation' begins to have meaning for socialist feminism in Parmar's (1989) recent analysis of black women's identity. She offers a framework which could

equally well be applied to the experience of white women, or women of different social classes.

*Racial identity alone cannot be a basis for collective organising as the black communities are as beset with divisions around culture, sexuality and class as any other community....The black communities of Britain have discontinuous histories and have been culturally and socially displaced through migration, slavery, indentured labour systems and as political refugees and exiles. The concept of diaspora which embraces the plurality of these different histories and cultural forms is one which allows access into the diversity of articulations around identity and cultural expressions. It is also a way out of the essentialism of certain notions of blackness which refuse to acknowledge or understand the transitory nature of historical and political moments.*

(quoted Parmar, 1989, p 59)

Key to this analysis has been the need to overcome the separatism and fragmentation of the last decade and to do so not merely through theoretical debate but through developing a politics which integrates theory and practice. This strategy, as well as the increasing attention being given to the international dimensions of women's struggle and the links being made to other progressive movements are seen, by some, as representative of a new and exciting era (41).

The history of socialist feminist perspectives in education reveals the impact of some of these developments. In reassessing my academic biography, I am struck by the common threads which tie my thinking to the political currents and debates of the day. I have shown how, over the course of the last ten years, I have tried to address such criticisms of political economy, social and cultural reproduction theory and socialist feminist research in education. Initially I hoped to avoid the problems associated with socialist analyses of education by contributing a theory of gender codes and the production of gender difference. Some have argued that the concept of gender code has remained, like that of Bernstein's educational



code, elusive (King 1987). Yet Acker (1987) argues that it is still probably the most promising concept in socialist feminist work to guide empirical research - research that is essential if 'reproduction theory' is to be tested within school settings. She does, however, also argue that, 'the extent to which any ...school practices actually are required for the reproduction of the sexual and social division of labour is undemonstrated and probably undemonstrable.' ( Acker 1987, p427)

Nevertheless, there are now encouraging signs that the theoretical framework I, and others, developed around the concepts of class and gender reproduction, is being taken up by those interested in school-based research, particularly using ethnographic techniques. Taylor (1984), Valli (1986) and Gaskell (1987) in their studies of commercial courses for girls, and the research of Griffith (1985) and Wallace (1987) on the cultural expectations of young adults in relation to the sexual, marriage and the labour markets (42), reveal a far greater understanding of the specific patterning of education for different groups of girls. The danger here lies, not in failing to address the complexity of gender difference, but in reifying the differences in experiential identities (Segal 1989). Indeed, the relationship between such different experiences of education are not often analysed. I also believe that the original premises of my theory of gender codes still remain true. We still need to understand not just femininity but gender relations; not just the processes of reproduction but also the effects of different modes of transmission and the processes of recontextualisation of gender relations into educational relations.

A positive reading of the direction which socialist feminist perspectives in education is taking might also stress the more recent concern for educational practice, especially anti-sexist movements in schools (43). In Chapter 11, Weiner and I noted the particular strategies adopted by socialist teachers, especially in teacher unions. However, although Middleton (1984) would like to define socialist feminist writers, by their concern for 'an educational praxis', on the whole, it is unclear how links with teachers might be made and whether such a goal is any more than a well meaning gesture (O'Brien 1986; Acker 1987). My own contribution to the aspect of educated research has been limited. I was fortunate

enough to have the opportunity to work directly with teachers, which offered me new insights into the nature of anti-sexist strategies in schools. However I cannot argue that it gave me a sufficiently well developed understanding of what critical pedagogy entails. The debates over connected teaching, gender-balanced curriculum and female management styles in the United States and Canada (44) and the recent forays into what would constitute 'progressive', 'socialist' and 'democratic' education in Britain (45) contain many opportunities for further research and development.

Finally, the formulation of a new direction for socialist feminism in the women's movement entailing a concept of 'politics as a hegemonic project' (Hall, 1987) resonates with the direction of current educational analyses. Despite being one of its sternest critics, Mary O'Brien (1987), argues that Marxist theory still holds some promise for feminists.

*Feminist scholarship has started to lay the intellectual foundations of feminist education, feminist politics and feminist values. The difficult issue is how far critique of male-stream thought can go in such development. Neo-Marxism, which marginalises women but understands the private realm as ideologically significant, may hold heuristic and analytical possibilities which its current androcentrism conceals.*

(O'Brien, 1987, p 43)

The value of such theory lies, for O'Brien, as for many of us, in Gramsci's theory of hegemony. It offers the chance to 'unpack the socio-ideological processes of cultural reproduction without falling into the crevices of theology, economism, or barren structuralism' (O'Brien 1987, p43). It offers the prospect of lifting the mantle of pessimism which characterised reproduction theory in the 1970's, since as I have argued in a number of chapters in this thesis, it focuses attention on the dynamics of conflict, but even more importantly, perhaps, on the possibility of change. This theme in my own work is one which, as Weiler (1988, p38) argues, is perhaps the most significant aspect of my contribution to the field. She comments,



*Underlying all (Arnot's) work is the central understanding that social relationships are always in process and are constructed by individual human beings within a web of power and material constraints.*

The limits of my analysis of male hegemony have, however, been revealed by O'Brien more extensive use of the concept of 'patriarchal hegemony'. By exploiting Gramsci's theory of civil society, O'Brien argues that physical violence and patterns of child bearing and rearing in the family are also part of this masculine hegemony, which has its own material force and its own consequences in the production of different epistemologies for men and women.

In completing this review of my own work, I am reminded how long and perhaps tortuous my quest for a theory of class and gender relations has been. I am also fully aware of how much further we need to go before we can say we understand the complexity and subtleties of the educational system. However, O'Brien encourages us to think that even if, in the end, we need to develop new language, concepts and method:

This is not, as it seems on the surface an impasse, nor is it, as men love to say, 'a challenge'. It is the existential reality of women's life. It is also .... the condition of the exciting projection of a new epistemology'. (O'Brien, 1986, p101)

## **(e) FOOTNOTES**

- (1)** A range of problems have already been identified. For example, the plans for 'two-tiered' science courses (of 12.5% and 20% of the timetable) might disadvantage girls and the CDT proposals might cause difficulties for girls' schools. The Equal Opportunities Commission has warned of the dangers of 'differentiated' teaching and unequal access to the National Curriculum (EOC, 1989).
- (2)** For accounts of feminist academics' experiences of research and teaching in the social sciences, see, for example, Scott and Porter (1984), Taylorson (1984), Stanley (1984) and David (1987).
- (3)** Different feminist perspectives have been identified, for example, by Jagger (1979), Eisenstein (1984), Middleton (1984), Acker (1986, 1987), Yates (1987), Arnot and Weiner (1987). These distinctions owe as much to political perspectives within the women's movement as they do to educational paradigms already in existence. Although they are not always clearly discernible in the work of particular authors, and some authors cross over from one viewpoint to another, the classification of perspectives is still felt to be useful for an analysis of different tendencies and theoretical projects within women's studies.
- (4)** There have been many critiques of liberal theory. Early examples can be found in Dale, Esland and MacDonald (1975), Bowles and Gintis (1976), and more recently CCCS (1981) and Connell et al. (1982).
- (5)** See, for example, Spender and Sarah (1980), Lobban (1974, 1976) and Whyld (1983).
- (6)** Lesbian studies has even acquired its own text book in the United States (Cruikshank 1982). In Britain, although there are few educational texts in this area, lesbian feminists such as Franklin and Stacey (1986) and Kitzinger (1987) offer critiques of the heterosexism of women's studies which are relevant to educational studies.
- (7)** The growth of interest in Women's Studies and gender studies can be found in the expansion of feminist publishing, Women's Studies courses in school and in further, higher and adult education, and the many academic dissertations and research projects in the area.
- (8)** There are numerous references that are relevant here. For good summaries of such critiques of education, see Young (1971), Open University (1976), Whitty and Young (1976) and Young and Whitty (1977).



- (9) There is considerable debate surrounding the relationship between structure and agency - see for example Giddens (1979), Whitty (1981), Apple (1982) and Giroux (1983).
- (10) For critiques of reproduction theory see, for example, CCCS (1981), Hall (1981) and Hargreaves (1982).
- (11) Summaries of the ten year domestic labour debate can be found, for example, in Kaluznynska (1980) and MacDonald (1981).
- (12) For a broad overview of Women's studies see, for example, Open University (1983), Beechey and Whitelegg (1986).
- (13) These differences between David, Deem and I were noted by Kenway (1988) and Middleton (1984).
- (14) Walford (1983b) found the concept of dual labour markets discussed in this Unit particularly useful for his study of girls entering into male public schools.
- (15) A good deal of historical work emphasised the role which domestically oriented education played in girls' schooling. See, for example, Delamont and Duffin (1978) and Dyhouse (1981).
- (16) Lobban (1974, 1976), Children's Rights Workshop (1976) are examples of this kind of approach to reading schemes, whilst Walford (1981, 1983a) is typical of many of the analysis of secondary school textbooks.
- (17) In the UK, this was described by Weiner (1985, 1988), in Australia, by Yates (1987) and in New Zealand by Middleton (1988).
- (18) This was seen most vividly in the GIST project and later in the series of texts published by the Schools Council/ Longman (e.g. Stones, 1983; Whyte, 1983), also in the development of school initiatives reported in the Women and Education, Cassoe, and Schools Council Newsletters.
- (19) Interest in post-structural theories such as that of Foucault (1970, 1979) at the time were complemented by increasing interest in schools as a site of cultural production (c.f. Willis, 1983)

- (20) I was later to give a talk on gender perspectives in primary education (Arnot, 1984) which provided me with the opportunity to survey the literature on this phase of schooling. I did not have the chance, however, to develop this further.
- (21) Since 1983, I have had the opportunity to present the coeducation debate in Spain which has recently moved to coeducational state secondary schools (Arnot 1987).
- (22) Willis (1977) and Tolson (1977) were exceptions
- (23) For coverage of these debates see Wilson (1977), Open University (1983), Dale and Foster (1986) and Williams (1989).
- (24) These points were also made in Gordon West's and Ann Marie Wolpe's reviews of *Class, Gender and Education*, in the British Journal of Sociology of Education, 3,3, 1982, 297-308.
- (25) The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) and the Women's National Commission (WNC) in their many publications have called for a coordinated national policy and local authority commitment to equal opportunities between the sexes. See Chapter 10 of the thesis for a discussion.
- (26) Byrne (1978) called without success for a Central Advisory Council to be set up to review girls' education.
- (27) See, for example, Ozga and McNay (1985) and Dale (1987).
- (28) Finch (1984) offers one of the few analyses of how positive discrimination and social engineering affected female education.
- (29) See, for example, Carby (1982), Feminist Review (1984) Bryan et al. (1985) as well as those referred to earlier in this introduction.
- (30) Op.cit. note 2
- (31) The Schools Council Sex Differentiation Project was unique in being the only funded nationally based project. See Millman and Weiner (1985) for a report.
- (32) The EOC and NUT have provided valuable sources of data on student course choices and qualifications, and women teacher's careers.



- (33) See, for example, Delamont and Duffin (1978), Dyhouse (1976, 1977, 1978) and Purvis (1981a and b).
- (34) A range of authors might be quoted here. For example, Clarricoates (1978,1980), McRobbie (1978), Fuller (1980,1982), Gaskell (1983), Davies (1984) and Griffith (1985). For a discussion of the value of quantitative research, see Kelly (1987) and Jayaratne (1983).
- (35) Contrast, for example, criticism of marxist theory found in Stanley and Wise (1983) with recent debates in Feminist Review (1989).
- (36) There are many other authors who have also been associated with this tradition. For example, socialist feminists in North America such as Jean Valli (1983), Jane Gaskell (1983, 1986) and Linda Valli (1986) and Kathleen Weiler (1987). Cultural studies research such as that conducted by McRobbie (1978) or Griffith (1985) and Fuller (1980, 1982), although not using a political economy perspective, is often discussed as part of the development of this tradition.
- (37) Op cit note 29. Wright (1987), for example, offers a challenge to feminist classroom research.
- (38) See, for example, Rowbotham, Segal and Wainwright (1979), Feminist Review (1986, 1989), Coote and Campbell (1987), Segal (1987), 1989) and Rowbotham (1989).
- (39) The development of this tradition can be found in cultural analysis of texts - for example, McRobbie and Frith (1981), McRobbie (1982), Walkerdine (1981), Frith (1987). It is also well represented in journals such as m/f, Formations, and Screen Education.
- (40) For a discussion of the shifts in the women's movement towards identity politics, see, for example, Segal (1989), Harriss (1989), Parmar (1989), Bhavnani (1989) and the editorials of Feminist Review (1986, 1989).
- (41) See Angela Davis' views of the Women's Movement, in Bhavnani (1989).
- (42) There are many other recent British examples of research which use the reproduction framework. See for example, Wolpe (1988b) and Skegg (1988) and others in the British Journal of the Sociology of Education.

- (43) See Brah and Deem (1986), Deem (1986), Wolpe (1989).
- (44) For a discussion of feminist pedagogy and forms of female authority see, for example, Belenky et al (1986) and Shakeshaft (1987).
- (45) I am thinking here of Gordon (1989), Wolpe (1989) and Kelly (1989).



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## **IV PUBLICATIONS**

### **PART 1: RETHINKING REPRODUCTION THEORY**



# 1. Socio-cultural reproduction and women's education

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Within a capitalist mode of production, patriarchal relations which are characterized by male-female hierarchy and dominance assume specific historical forms, at the economic, the political and ideological levels. Even though patriarchal forms of control existed prior to the advent of capitalism, the economic and social subordination of women has, nevertheless, become an integral element of the capitalist social formation. This is not to assume that they constitute an essential ingredient, necessary for the survival of that system, but rather to recognize that they figure as one of its central organizing principles. In the capitalist economy, patriarchal relations have a specific material base in, for example, the separation of the family from the production process, in the economic dependence of women on men. In this chapter, therefore, I shall attempt to develop an analysis of women's education which relates the form and content of schooling to women's position in such societies. The emphasis will be upon the way in which schooling produces both classed and sexed subjects, who are to take their place in a social division of labour structured by the dual, yet often contradictory, forces of class and gender relations.

Despite the diversity of material and forms of analysis now available for the study of women's education, some of which are represented in this volume, there is one consistent overriding concern. The essential unity of purpose in this research is the establishment of the sociology of women's education on the academic agenda. The pressure which this research exerts upon existing accounts of schooling takes the form of demanding recognition for the ways in which schooling constructs, modifies and transmits specific definitions of gender and gender relations to each new generation, within and across class boundaries. The challenge inherent in these analysis is to reassess current explanations of schooling, which have glossed over or ignored the existence of the sexual division of labour within the school and its impact in determining the relations between the family, schooling and the labour processes.

It is my intention in this chapter to reassess two major bodies of theory, to investigate their limitations, and to suggest how they may be reformulated in the light of new evidence. I shall



concentrate on what have been called the theories of social reproduction and those of cultural reproduction of the class structure. Within the first tradition I shall focus on the work of Althusser (1) and of Bowles and Gintis; (2) within the second, the work of Bernstein; (3) with the aim of using these theories as the basis for an explanatory model of the forms of women's education within societies which are both capitalist and patriarchal.

In the work of Althusser and Bowles and Gintis, one finds the initial premise, that education plays a central, if not critical, role in the reproduction of a capitalist mode of production. As outlined by Althusser, there are essentially two aspects to this process. First there is the reproduction of productive forces; and, second, and perhaps more importantly, there is the reproduction of the social relations of production.

In the analysis of the reproduction of productive forces, Althusser points to the fact that if any social formation is to reproduce itself, it must ensure not merely that its labour force is available in sufficient numbers (through biological reproduction and immigration), but also that it must be diversified, adequately skilled, and competent to work within a given social structure. Historically the reproduction of the work force was provided by 'on the job' training and apprenticeship schemes. Under capitalism outside institutions, such as the educational system, increasingly have taken over the task of providing workers with basic skills such as literacy and numeracy. Further, the educational system equips future workers with the appropriate attitudes for work, which include acceptance of the rules of good behaviour, 'respect for the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination' (Althusser, 1971, p. 127). Individuals, he argues, are placed in a certain relation to the existing social order - relations of 'subjection to the ruling ideology or mastery of its practice' (p. 128).

These parameters may also be found with the analysis of Bowles and Gintis's (1976) 'Schooling in Capitalist America'. Here they stress the importance of educational structures as selective and allocating devices for the social reproduction of the class structure. The function of school, they argue, is to produce a differentiated, stratified and conforming work force, adjusted in personality and character, equipped with the necessary skills and competences to work in the socio-economic division of labour.

In analysing the labour force found within the US economy, Bowles and Gintis recognize, under capitalism, the tendencies for the labour market to segment, and point out the segregation of the primary and secondary labour markets. The primary segment they locate predominantly in the corporate and state sectors, where jobs are characterized by relatively high wages, job ladders and opportunities for promotion. Within this segment, there are likely to be high levels of job security and workers' unionization. In the secondary labour market there are relatively low wages, little workers' unionization, low levels of job security, and little chance of promotion and training. Within this labour market are to be found the most oppressed groups, which in the USA are 'blacks', Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, native Americans, women, the elderly, youth and other minority groups (my emphasis, Bowles and Gintis, 1976, p.67).



By classifying women as yet another minority group, Bowles and Gintis fail to analyse labour market segmentation as one of the most significant features of the integration of the sexual division of labour and in particular of patriarchal power structures within the very nature of the capitalist formation. They thus gloss over the presence of a sex-segregated labour force within and across the binary division of primary and secondary labour markets. Particularly in the USA there is a process of 'ghettoization' of the female labour force in the secondary labour market.(4)

Further, there exists a sexual division of labour within each segment, where women are typically employed in jobs that have subsequently been defined as stereotypically 'feminine' occupations, whether it is because of their assumed manual dexterity (e.g., textiles), their domestic interests (food processing, health care, cleaning, etc.), or their vocation in providing personal services (teaching, social work, etc.). What characterizes women's location both within and between these different labour markets is their inferior position with regard to wages, training prospects and promotion. Although Bowles and Gintis recognize that capitalism has adapted and utilized pre-existing 'social prejudices' such as racism and sexism, they neglect to give any material basis to what in their analysis appear to be exogenous ideological factors. Any theory of education which seeks to account for the form of schooling in terms of the mode of reproduction of the work force, I would argue, must recognize the structure of male-female dominance relations as integral and not subsidiary organizing principles of the work process.

Within this framework, it is essential that we recognize the pattern of specifically female employment as different from that of men. The changing definitions of jobs from 'masculine' to 'feminine' and vice versa are one aspect of the dynamic nature of women's position in society. At one level this is mediated, as shown by Ashton and Maguire (ch.9), by the attitudes, expectations and ideology of employers, who operate and realize historically specific conceptions of female employees, their abilities, and their personalities (diligence, lack of boredom with routine tasks, dexterity).

These conceptions, however, whilst appearing as an independent variable in the process of employee selection, are core features of the pattern of use of female labour within the economy. As Beechey (5) has argued, capital acquires certain advantages in the employment of female labour within certain sectors of the labour force. The two major advantages she identifies relate to the dual location of women within the family and the production process. First, when all members of a workman's family are employed, the value of labour power is lowered as the costs of reproduction (e.g., nurturance, household and health care) are spread over all members of the population. Second, the value of female labour is less than that of men since women have less training, and are not expected to pay the full costs of the household, as it can be assumed that they will be supported by their menfolk. Women are not expected to bear the costs of their own reproduction, therefore employers may also pay less than the value of female labour, since women are defined as subsidiary workers, financially dependent on men within a patriarchal family.



The hiring of female labour, while it has its advantages, also poses dilemmas for capital, especially in the employment of married women workers. The greater the use of married women in wage labour, the more threatened is the effective performance of their work as domestic labourers within the family. The separation of waged from domestic labour, of production from consumption, of the economy from family life is not merely a facet of the development of capitalism but also constitutes one of the elements of the process of reproduction of that system. Women's services within the family as wife, mother, servant, therapist, etc. are critical aspects of the reproduction of the labour force.(6) The tension therefore exists within capitalism in maintaining an appropriate balance between the need for certain types of labour power on the one hand, and on the other, the continued functioning of the patriarchal nuclear family, which services and reproduces the labour force outside the production system.

Any account of the relationship between schooling and the structure of the labour force must therefore take into account the differing positions of women and men within the social formation. It must furthermore take heed of the advice (Coulson et al., 1975, p.60) that

the central feature of women's position under capitalism is not their role simply as domestic workers, but rather the fact that they are both domestic and wage labourers. It is this dual and contradictory role that imparts a specific dynamic to their situation.

It is important to recognize the existence of class differences operating within the female labour force, which determines not merely the sort of jobs which women are likely to find themselves in, but also their relation to the means of production. Within the working class, women workers bear the same relation to the means of production as working-class men, since they own only their own labour power to sell on the labour market. At the other extreme women within the capitalist class might well have a different relationship to the means of production than their menfolk. Whilst their fathers and husbands are more likely to own and control capital directly, buying the labour of others, these women may indirectly benefit from and live off the accumulation of family wealth without any necessity to work for an income. With the breaking down of patrilineal inheritance and the rights of women to own independent property, potentially more women of this class can become actively involved in the production process as owners of capital, shareholders and employers. They are still represented in very small numbers in the structures of management and control. For the majority of these women, the relation to the means of production is one of indirect ownership and control. In the professional middle classes, while the men are likely to become the ideologists or the managers of capital, the women, located primarily in the 'caring' professions, may be a major source of what Bernstein (1977d) called the 'agents of symbolic control', presenting the 'soft' face of capitalism in the welfare and educational agencies. It is important, therefore, to recognize the difference between the forms of women's education found in the private and state schools, and further to relate the forms within them not just to women's



labour but also to their future class position.

What Bowles and Gintis have tended to assume is that, within the differential forms of schooling catering for different sectors of the wage labour force, both sexes experience on the whole similar conditioning. Carter (1976, p.180), in the same tradition of political economy, is more careful about assuming similarities, even though he does not attempt an analysis of the differences.

The structural relation of school experience to subsequent labour market experience for women is very complex and does not exactly replicate the relation that obtains for men. For instance, many women achieve good grades, graduate from high school and still obtain only secondary jobs. To understand the relationship of women to existing job structures, we must consider not only the structure and ideology of schooling but also the structure and ideology of the family. To avoid confusing the analysis with too many details, we have ignored the circumstances peculiar to the experience of women.

What becomes clear from the study of forms of women's education, particularly in terms of curriculum and examinations, is the different routes the two sexes take through the educational system. For the working-class girl, often allocated to the curriculum streams of the 'less able' requiring courses in 'everyday life' and 'citizenship', basic training in skills and non-examination courses, the experience is orientated towards a future domestic role rather than waged labour. Training is directed towards domesticity, with courses in household crafts such as cooking and sewing added to a diluted academic curriculum. As Wolpe has shown, (7) the 'common code' in British government planning in education has been founded on the assumption of gender differentiation with the belief that women's primary role in society is to become wives and mothers, despite the fact that large numbers of women become workers outside the home. There is an assumed dichotomy between the world of work which is taken as the primary goal and interest of boys, and the world of the family and marriage as the future desire of girls. The educational motto of 'preparation for life' takes on specific meanings in the ideological climate of patriarchy. The results can be seen in the alignment of forms of education for socially defined and attributed gender roles.

The patterns of working-class girls' schooling (though this may appear contradictory, given the presence of working-class women in the labour force) may have a certain logic. By regarding marital and maternal roles as primary goals in life, working-class women are likely to treat work within social production as a peripheral and secondary concern. This focusing upon domestic life for personal fulfilment, which is encouraged rather than discouraged by the educational system, may partially explain why women are prepared to accept employment in the worst, lowest-paid jobs within the secondary labour market. The provision of a form of schooling for domesticity may be one of the ways in which the conditions are ensured for the continued existence of a female reserve army of labour and an unskilled, cheap, female labour force. Such a form of schooling would also contribute indirectly to the reproduction of capitalism by encouraging a female domestic labour force, responsible for the biological reproduction and the nurturance of workers.



For the middle classes, school experience is different but no less contradictory. The overt ideology of equal opportunity and equality between the sexes, although realized by the equal range of curriculum options made available to both sexes and the expressed liberalism of the teachers, may well run counter to the hidden curriculum of the school, which perpetuates the ideology of femininity as synonymous with wife and mother. Even where the school is geared more towards careers, the assumption can often be identified in teachers' attitudes and their guidance on choice of school subjects, that these careers are best found in typically 'feminine' professions, such as medicine, education, social work, etc. Ironically too, these girls may well receive sufficient academic qualifications to proceed to higher education and full-time careers which later come into conflict with their concept of marital life. Particularly within the professional middle classes, one finds a strong belief in motherhood as a professional full-time job which requires the mother to be at home with her children, responsible for the reproduction of the class culture by her domestic pedagogic work, and capable of responding to the demands made upon her by the schools.(8)

In the case of working-class girls, the ideology of sex differences, and the naturalness of the sexual division of labour between home and work, is often overt, with only minimal recognition of the necessity for or the desire of, these girls to take up paid employment. In the education of the middle-class girl, the situation is reversed. There is often a recognition of the desirability that women should achieve academically, in order to obtain some work fulfilment and career prospects; this is set against the likelihood that once married they will have much greater financial security and less need to work either for money or for fulfilment, given motherhood. In both cases, the ideology of femininity and the acceptance of the sexual division of labour act as a filter for the continued presence of women in certain types of labour with specific expectations and attitudes to work.

If we turn now to the reproduction of the social relations of production (i.e., the class relations operating within the structuring of the labour process) we find the kernel of Althusser's and Bowles and Gintis's analyses of schooling. Both see the reproduction of the social relations found in the production process as the central function and determining force in the shape of schooling within capitalism. For Althusser, the educational system is the dominant ideological state apparatus which processes each school population in accordance with, and in preparation for, the class structure and class power relations. The process is one of selective socialization where groups of children, on the basis of their class origins, are given different types and amounts of education through which they acquire certain types of knowledge and know-how as well as particular ideological predispositions. Theoretically these acquisitions allow them to cope with and adapt to the work relations and authority structures in specific locations in their production process. Some children will thus be prepared for their future role as the exploited, with an apolitical, national, ethnical or civic consciousness. Others will learn how to give orders and enforce obedience, in expectation of their future role as agents of



exploitation (employers, managers) or agents of repression (police, army). The third major category will acquire the ability to manipulate ideologies and forms of consciousness. Within the seemingly neutral context of the school, 'the relations of production in a capitalist social formation, i.e. the relations of exploited to exploiters and exploiters to exploited, are largely reproduced', by a 'massive' inculcation of the ideology of the ruling class (Althusser, 1971, p.148).

In this rudimentary framework, Althusser concentrates upon class domination with no mention of the ways in which patriarchal ideology is transmitted in the school, mediating and contextualizing the ruling ideology of class domination within the structures of sexual oppression. A question he forgets to ask is: are women ever inculcated with the ideology suited for the agents of exploitation or repression? If any ideology is most likely to be acquired by women, it is that of the exploited, with relatively few trained to become professional ideologists.

In the work of Bowles and Gintis (1976), the reproduction of the social relations of production occurs through their presence in structural equivalents in the social relations of schooling. The form of socialization, rather than being ideological, is one of experience of the social relations and authority structures of schooling which mirror those to be found in future work places. In elaborating what they call the 'correspondence principle', they identify a structural homology between the hierarchy of the teacher-pupil relations and that of the supervisor/manager over the worker, which reproduces the authority structures and forms of control characteristic of class relations (Bowles and Gintis, 1976, p.131):

Specifically, the social relationships of education - the relationships between administrators and teachers, teachers and students, students and students, and students and their work - replicate the hierarchical division of labour. Hierarchical relations are reflected in the vertical authority lines from administrators to teachers to students. Alienated labour is reflected in the student's lack of control over his or her education, the alienation of the student from the curriculum content, and the motivation of school work through a system of grades and other external rewards rather than the student's integration with either the process (learning) or the outcome (knowledge) of the educational 'production process'.

Beyond this aggregate level, Bowles and Gintis point to the different forms of education and internal organization of schools, which prepare children for different levels within the occupational structure. Whilst the lowest levels are likely to emphasize rule-following and close supervision, the middle and higher levels of education provide greater space for initiative, moving from discipline and direct control to more independent activity. These levels are to be found not merely in the various tiers of the educational system but also within streamed schools. The implications of these structures are the attunement of each generation to the behavioural norms required by the levels of the capitalist production process, which are internalized in the 'types of personal demeanor, modes of self presentation, self image and social class identifications which are the crucial ingredients of job adequacy' (ibid).



In this analysis of schooling, there is little recognition of the potential correspondence between patriarchal authority structures and the hierarchy of male over female within the social relations of the school and of the work processes. This might be due to the fact that Bowles and Gintis define sexual inequality and prejudices as external to the operation of capitalism. They point out that the 'smooth control over the work process requires that the authority structure of the enterprise respect the wider society's prejudices. In particular socially acceptable power relationships must be respected' (p.98). They suggest, but do not develop the point, that a strong case could be made that the form and strength of both racism and sexism are closely related to the particular historical development of class relations in the USA and Europe.

Furthermore, they do not analyse the ways in which sexual power relations have become integral features of capitalist work structures. The control of women workers by male managers, for example, may be found mirrored in the sexual hierarchy of the school's division of labour, with a male headteacher and inspectors and a large female teaching force. Within the fragmentation of knowledge, one can also find the stratification of knowledge reproducing the hierarchy of male over female with particular school subjects and disciplines classified as 'masculine' or 'feminine' (Harding, Chapter 7 and Weiner, Chapter 6), which contribute to the acceptance of students of the sexual divisions within the labour force. In the classroom the authority of the teacher may also be affected by sex. In the primary school, the teacher's authority is more likely to be similar to that of the mother (i.e. personalized), while at the university level the model is one of paternal authority, based upon status and position.(9)

This sexual division of labour in school knowledge and amongst the teaching staff is perhaps one of the ways in which women become attuned to the dual forms of control found within their specific work locations. For example, within an office the form of control between male bosses and their female secretaries is likely to contain elements of paternalism. In industry, as Gee found,(10) the form of control of the female work force was a combination of patriarchal and capitalist management practices. She concludes (Gee, 1978):

The sexual division of labour underpinned by the patriarchal structure of the family and the division of labour in detail, brought together under factory discipline and management, means for women a dual form of control in the work place.

The implication of this dual form of control within the work place is that women are expected to be both docile to management and docile to men. Such a training in obedience and subservience can be seen located in the educational system, which expects high degrees of conformity not only to the school norm of a good pupil but also to the definition of femininity, as the research on the hidden curriculum of schooling has shown.(11)

Further, socialization into both class and gender identity is also found within the family, where, as Bowles and Gintis (1976, p.144) point out:

Despite the tremendous structural disparity between family and economy - one which is never really overcome in capitalist



society - there is a significant correspondence between the authority relationships in capitalist production and family child-rearing.... The male-dominated family, with its characteristically age-graded patterns of power and privilege, replicates many aspects of the hierarchy of production in the firm.

Interestingly here, they notice the existence of patriarchy as one potential element in the authority structures of production. While they have not accounted for the ways in which schooling may reproduce, at an ideological and structural level, the sexual division of labour, they do analyse very briefly the role of the family in this context. (p.144):

First, wives and mothers themselves normally embrace their self concepts as household workers. They then pass these on to their children through the differential sex role-typing of boys and girls within the family. Second, and perhaps more important, children tend to develop self concepts based on the sexual divisions which they observe around them. Even families which attempt to treat boys and girls equally cannot avoid sex role-typing when the male parent is tangentially involved in household labour and child-rearing. In short the family as a social as well as biological reproduction unit cannot but reflect its division of labour as a production unit. This sex typing, unless countered by other social forces, then facilitates the submission of the next generation of women to their inferior status in the wage labour system and lends its alternative - child rearing and domesticity - an aura of inevitability, if not desirability.

It would appear that if we are to understand the ways in which women are prepared to take their assigned place within capitalism in the family and in the labour force, we need to investigate the processes of gender construction in both the family and education. As David has argued, (12) it is time to look at the family-education couple as the dual determining agencies of reproduction of sexual divisions within the social formation.

With this in mind, I shall now turn to the theories of cultural reproduction and specifically to the work of Basil Bernstein (13), who analyses education in terms of the contribution it makes to the cultural reproduction of the class structure. This work emphasizes the importance of the culture of the curriculum and the social and moral order of the school. Unlike the social reproduction theories, which stress the economic inequalities of class societies, Bernstein emphasizes the mediation of the family between class origin and school as the critical source of cultural inequality. Not concerned with the inheritance of economic capital, he develops his analyses around the concept of symbolic property (language, cultural tastes, manners) and educational property in the form of certificates and diplomas. Although Bernstein does not specifically address the question of gender differentiation within schooling, his theory makes available conceptual tools which can be usefully employed in the analysis of gender relations in schooling. According to Bernstein (1977b, p.85):

Educational knowledge 'is a major regulator of the structure of experience. From this point of view, one can ask 'How are forms of experience, identity and relation evoked, maintained and

changed by the formal transmission of educational knowledge and sensitivities?'

In investigating this question, Bernstein concentrates upon the ways in which schooling reproduces the social order through the categorization of pupils by age, sex and social class. This categorization lies embedded in the structuring of knowledge and also in the form of pedagogy, the spatial organization of the school and the evaluation criteria. The two critical features of school experience are to be found in the form of classification (the construction and maintenance of boundaries between different categories, their interrelations and stratification) and framing (the form and degree of control within pedagogic relations, between teacher and taught).

Using this theoretical framework, it is possible to investigate the ways in which schooling transmits a specific gender code whereby individuals' gender identity and gender roles are constructed under the school's classification system. The boundaries between the appropriate activities, interests, and expectations of future work for the two sexes are maintained, and the relations and hierarchies between the two are determined by such a gender code.

In traditional schools one may find a strong boundary between the definitions of masculinity and femininity, which will be reinforced by the application of this principle to the spatial organization of the school, school uniforms, classroom activities and curriculum subjects. This will be implemented through specific pedagogic relationships where the framing is strong. The child's behaviour will be evaluated according to sex-appropriate criteria (e.g., 'that is quite good for a girl', 'little girls don't do that'). In this type of school, the teacher in the classroom is most likely to operate distinctions between male and female children in terms of their notion of a 'good pupil', their expectations of ability and educational success, and their form of discipline. This form of pedagogy would most likely occur in societies or communities where the sexual division of labour in the home and in the work environment was strongly demarcated. As Clarricoates found in her research (Chapter 2), the classification of gender roles was strongest and most overt in schools serving industrial or agricultural communities where sexual differentiation at the economic and ideological levels was strong.

In schools serving either the suburban middle classes or the semi-skilled or skilled occupational groups on a council estate, the classification of children by gender was weakened in the spatial arrangements and types of education which girls and boys received. It was nevertheless to be found within the classrooms, despite the ideology of equal opportunity. While gender may not have been the major organizing principle of the school structure, it was still operative in the context of pupil control (i.e. strong framing). In none of the primary schools studied by Clarricoates could one say that the gender code was characterized by weak classifications (i.e., equality between the sexes) and weak frames (freedom to negotiate the definitions of gender). Given that a strong sexual division of labour exists within capitalism, it is not surprising that the dominant gender code of schooling in Britain is that of strong classification, which reproduces the power relations of male-female



hierarchy, and strong framing, where teachers play a large part in determining gender definitions and control. Within this dominant code, one may of course always find 'codings': particular expressions of the dominant ideology which may attempt to weaken gender roles.

The dominant code can be 'interrupted' (14) by single-sex schools, in which, without the presence of one sex, the gender boundaries are blurred and the form of gender control weakened, as Shaw (Chapter 5) has shown. Nevertheless, children within this type of schooling will still acquire the principles of gender classification by the very existence of a division of schools based upon sex difference. Once such pupils have reached higher education, they will be confronted with the academic sexual division of labour (Rendel, Chapter 11) and the realities, after graduating, of the labour market and career prospects (Chisholm and Woodward, Chapter 12).

The constraints which limit the possibility of weakening gender classifications and patriarchal structures are manifold, especially since they are, as has been previously argued, integral elements of the capitalist mode of production. That is not to say that reforms are not possible. One starting point must certainly be the breaking down of gender roles within the family and the patterns of child-rearing. As Bernstein (1977c, p.129-30) argues:

To the extent that the infant/primary school fails to utilize age and sex as allocating categories, either for the acquisition and progression of competencies or for the allocation of pupils to groups and spaces, the school is weakening the function of these categories in the family and the community.

In particular, such restructuring is likely to affect the mother's domestic pedagogic work. This process could be accomplished by a series of educational reforms including the re-education of teachers, the editing and selection of textbooks, the monitoring of classroom practice and curriculum guidance, and the availability of all curriculum options for both populations of school children.

Just as it is certain that these reforms would make an impact upon sexual inequalities, especially at the level of gender identification of children, it is also certain that the reproduction of sexual division is not a smooth, unproblematic process. The setting up and transmission of sex stereotypes as a form of social control does not necessarily imply that individuals become what the stereotype demands. As Fuller has shown in her contribution to this volume (Chapter 4), West Indian black girls strive for academic achievement and, by doing so, resist the stereotypes of 'blackness' and 'femininity'. Operating a delicate balance between resistance and acceptance of school norms, they walk a tight rope between conformity to school discipline and conformity to the racial and sexual stereotypes.

In the case of white working-class girls and boys, the mediation of class and gender categorization takes different forms. As Willis (1977) has shown in his research into the behaviour and attitudes of working-class boys, these 'lads' celebrate their masculinity against school norms of docile, conforming and diligent pupils. By labelling such pupils as effeminate and 'cissies', the 'lads' affirm their pugnacious and physical masculinity in an anti-school culture.

They thus confirm their respect for their masculine identity, derived from their families and peer group, and see its fulfilment in hard, physically demanding manual jobs. According to Willis, the 'lads' therefore invert the mental-manual hierarchy to match the male-female hierarchy. As he describes it, (p.148):

This important inversion, however, is not achieved within the proper logic of capitalist production. Nor is it produced in the concrete articulation of the site of social classes of two structures which in capitalism can only be separated in abstraction and whose forms have now become part of it. These are patriarchy and the distinction between mental and manual labour. The form of the articulation is of the cross-valorization and association of the two key terms in the two sets of structures. The polarization of the two structures becomes crossed. Manual labour is associated with the social superiority of masculinity, and mental labour with the social inferiority of femininity. In particular manual labour is imbued with a masculine tone and nature which renders it positively expressive of more than its intrinsic focus in work.

Mandy Llewellyn (Chapter 3), on the other hand, together with other researchers such as McRobbie (1978) and Sharpe (1976), reveals that the definitions of femininity can act as both a prison and as an escape route for working-class girls. Because they are female, their academic failure is legitimated, their success treated as unusual luck or a result of over-diligent, hence 'boring' effort. Femininity as constructed within the school does not encourage achievement or ambition in the academic world; rather it directs the girls to external goals of being good female companions to men. In this sense it runs counter to the prevailing ideology of education, which stresses academic achievement, intelligence and material success in later life.

On the other hand, the concept of femininity can provide working-class girls with the weapons with which to fight a class-determined education when the realities of working class life-chances are recognized for what they are. By searching for emotional and personal fulfilment in domestic life and motherhood, the girls can turn away from the frustrations of school life and meaningless employment. They themselves judge academic success not as masculine but rather as 'unfeminine' on the assumption that 'bluestockings' do not find husbands or boyfriends and therefore will fail as women. The effect, similar to the result of resistance of working-class lads, is to invert the hierarchy of productive over domestic labour, although they leave unchallenged the hierarchy of male over female. School resistance is individualized, unlike that of the working-class boys, yet it also derives from peer group culture and families' (particularly the mothers') definitions of femininity.

Paradoxically, then, while the school may not succeed in transmitting gender definitions which can merge easily with prescribed class identities, pupils may still acquire gender identities which prepare them indirectly for their future class position.

In conclusion, what I have attempted to show is that the theories of cultural and social reproduction, despite their limitations, (15) still raise interesting questions for the



sociology of women's education. By looking specifically at the educational experience of women, we are forced to modify any simple 'correspondence' theory of the relations between schooling and work. The contradictory nature of women's position in society, rather than being resolved through schooling, is more likely to be accentuated; and, if women are prepared for certain types of waged labour, it is often only indirectly. Furthermore, we need to ask the question, what relation, if any, does the 'gender code' of schooling have to the patriarchal relations in domestic life and in the production process? We also need to find out more about the forms of resistance to, and negotiation of, definitions of gender through class cultures and peer groups inside and outside the school.

Finally, while there is much more research required before we can say we understand women's education, this work should not preclude any of the very necessary programmes for breaking down sexual discrimination in our education system.

#### NOTES

- 1 Althusser (1971).
- 2 Bowles and Gintis (1976).
- 3 Bernstein (1977).
- 4 See, for example, Hartmann (1979); and for Britain see Barron and Norris (1976); Bosanquet and Doeringer (1973); Wolpe (1978); Ashton and Maguire in Chapter 9 of this volume.
- 5 Beechey (1978).
- 6 This area is now subject to what is commonly referred to as the 'domestic labour debate'. For good summaries of this debate, see Himmelweit and Mohun (1977) and Fee (1976).
- 7 Wolpe (1974 and 1978).
- 8 For an analysis of middle-class women's relation to 'progressive' primary schooling and the contradictions this poses for them, see Bernstein (1977c) and Chamboredon and Prévot (1975).
- 9 The distinction between personalized and positional authority is derived from Bernstein (1977a).
- 10 Gee (1978).
- 11 For a good summary of this research see Lobban (1978).
- 12 David (1978).
- 13 See specifically Bernstein (1977b).
- 14 This concept derives from Bernstein's analysis of 'progressive' primary schools (1977c), where 'interruption' is defined as a change in the form of transmission and reproduction of the dominant code.
- 15 For further analysis of the theories of cultural and social reproduction, see MacDonald (1977).

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## 2. Cultural Reproduction: The Pedagogy of Sexuality

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Madeleine MacDonald

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The incorporation of Pierre Bourdieu's work into what is loosely termed the 'marxist perspective' within Anglo-Saxon sociology of education is doubtless one reason for the steady growth of his reputation here.<sup>1</sup> This has been a highly selective process, as Annette Kuhn has already pointed out in *Screen Education*,<sup>2</sup> and it is in a popularised and often distorted form that many of his concepts – 'cultural capital', 'symbolic violence', 'mis-recognition' – have passed into everyday sociological speech. Also, the stress on works such as *Reproduction in Education, Culture and Society* (written in collaboration with J-C Passeron) has been at the expense of other equally important texts like the *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, where the theoretical premises of Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction can be found<sup>3</sup>. In part, this emphasis may reflect the strict division of academic labour in this country between sociology proper and anthropological analysis. In the *Outline*, Bourdieu draws upon a study of the Kayble society in Algeria to analyse, amongst other features, the nature of primary pedagogy in a non-literate society where early education takes place within the familial and community environment. *Reproduction*, although it too is concerned to relate symbolic classifications and cultural forms to the social structure and its power relations, concentrates on the mechanisms of social and cultural reproduction within institutionalised education in an advanced capitalist social formation. (Specifically, it investigates the role of the high status Arts faculties in French universities.)

This difference also suggests another reason for the neglect of the *Outline*. The central theme in sociological critiques of education tends to be the relationship between institutional schooling and the social division of labour – in particular, the extent to which formal education contributes to the reproduction of the class structure and the labour force. Informal and, in particular, domestic pedagogic work are given far less attention. Furthermore, the reproduction of the *sexual* division of labour is relegated to the family as a separate ideological (state) apparatus; schooling contributes to this only through a process of confirmation. In treating these factors as 'secondary', such critiques often attribute to the sexual division of labour a minor role in the formation of social inequalities and identities. Sexual oppression (when not wholly neglected) tends to be subsumed into the broader context of economic exploitation, thus avoiding the need to explain

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1 This brings together in a 'teeth gritting harmony' work as diverse as that of Althusser, Gramsci, Bernstein, and Bowles and Gintis.

2 Kuhn 'Ideology, Structure and Knowledge' in *Screen Education* 28 Autumn 1978.

3 P Bourdieu *Outline of a Theory of Practice* Cambridge 1977a; Bourdieu and J-C Passeron *Reproduction in Education, Culture and Society* London, Sage 1977. For critical responses to *Reproduction*, see Kuhn op cit; Richard Nice 'Bourdieu: A "Vulgar Materialist" in the Sociology of Culture' in *Screen Education* 28; David Schwartz 'Pierre Bourdieu: The Cultural Transmission of Social Inequality' in *Harvard Educational Review* v47 n4 November 1977; Madeleine MacDonald 'Curriculum and Cultural Reproduction' E202 Units 18/19, Open University Press 1977.



how particular forms of patriarchal relations operate within specific modes of production. This position would not only find it difficult to incorporate Bourdieu's anthropological studies; it also has clear limitations for socialists and teachers alike. In the first place, it assumes that any political strategy must concentrate on the abolition of class and relegates sexual oppression to a 'post-revolutionary' problem. In the second, in reaction to liberal beliefs, it leads to the argument that education can only play a minor role within such a strategy; economic upheaval and reformation are seen as the necessary conditions for radical social change.

Now, though, the growth of feminism as a political movement and increasingly as an academic discourse, has directed interest back to the ways in which pedagogy within formal and informal instructional contexts contributes to the reproduction of the sexual division of labour at both the socio-economic and cultural levels. Complex questions now arise. What role do the practices and discourses at work in educative contexts (such as the family, the community, the media, schools) play in forming and transmitting sexual identities, gender attributes and sexual power relations? Does schooling contribute to the reproduction of a particular mode of biological reproduction as well as the social/sexual division of labour? What role can education play in a movement for the breakdown of existing gender categories and definitions of sexuality? Attempts to answer these often shift uncomfortably between biological, psychological and sociological explanations. The debate has also been marked by a split between psychoanalytic explanations of the unconscious formation of sexed subjectivity and sociological accounts of the impact of the social construction of gender at the conscious level of 'learned' identity. This is not a controversy I can deal with here, but it does seem clear that some synthesis between psychoanalysis and marxism is needed as a precondition of the productive synthesis of the sexual struggle and socialist strategy. Thus, in their summary of the complexities of this debate, Steve Burniston, Frank Mort and Christine Weedon point to the 'necessary task of tracing, concretely, the relationship between historically specific forms of sex/gender identity (including their unconscious representation), the material practices which structure the acquisition of that identity (the media, the educational system, the labour process and primarily the mode of kinship/familial organisation) and the organisation of economic and social relations which constitute the mode of production.'<sup>4</sup> They also stress the particular need to analyse the family/kinship structures and the processes of ideological socialisation through which sexual identity is learned. Sexual structures, they argue, contribute (socially and unconsciously) to the maintenance of the specific form of social relations necessary for the biological reproduction of labour power, and hence the reproduction of the mode of production.

Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* also looks at the role of pedagogic work in the cultural reproduction of sexual structures. It is in this context, then, that I want to re-examine his work: for, although theories about class identity and experience, sex roles and gender identification abound in current thinking about education, the element of specifically *sexual* identity is noticeably lacking. The 'product' of schooling is still often

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<sup>4</sup> S Burniston, F Mort and C Weedon 'Psychoanalysis and the Cultural Acquisition of Sexuality and Subjectivity' in Women's Studies Group *Women Take Issue* London, CCCS/Hutchinson 1978 p128.

represented as a social subject without a biological presence (be it physically ascribed or socially attributed). The *Outline* and *Reproduction*, taken together, can offer a way into the analysis of education and sexuality, and in this article I shall begin by looking at the concept of *habitus* insofar as it represents the locus of class and sexual identities. I shall move on to an analysis of the sexual division of labour in terms of the distribution of cultural capital and forms of resistance to class domination through language and culture.

## Habitus

More than any other of Bourdieu's concepts, *habitus* reveals the influence of Durkheim's analysis of the ways in which symbolic classifications reproduce the categories and structural hierarchies of society. It is most fully elaborated in the *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, where Bourdieu argues that sociology should be an experimental science of the 'dialectic of the internalisation of externality and the externalisation of internality'.<sup>5</sup> This externality refers primarily to the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition, which are themselves the product of 'casual series' such as biological and social determinisms. Although they may be relatively independent, within a determinate historical conjuncture these series are brought together, in the last analysis by the economic base. The objective structures produce *habitus* – the systems of durable (lasting), transposable (adaptable and generalisable) dispositions. These patterns of thought generate practices and representations which in turn reproduce those objective structures of which they are themselves a product. So the *habitus* is a 'socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures'<sup>6</sup> which is overdetermined (that is, doubly determined) as it reproduces its own conditions of existence. It structures and determines patterns of thought, perception, aspirations, the sense of the possible, the impossible and the probable. It represents the condition for the production of forms of behaviour, forms of communication and cultural practices.

The trouble with sociologists, according to Bourdieu, is that they have ignored the dialectical relationship between objective structures and the cognitive motivating structures, or else, suffering from 'genesis amnesia', they have forgotten that objective structures are themselves products of historical practices. They therefore find difficulty in relating together different subsystems – an example would be the relationship between the mode of human reproduction (monogamy, polygamy), the economic mode and educational systems. Because they cannot recognise the *structural homology* which (Bourdieu argues) exists between these diverse systems, sociologists fall into the trap of dichotomising structure and practice, score and performance, essence and existence. Bourdieu therefore stresses the need to recognise that objective structures (he cites language and the economy as examples) reproduce themselves in the form of lasting dispositions in individuals who have been subjected to the same conditioning by being placed in the same material conditions of existence. All biological individuals who are the product of these objective conditions are the supports of the same

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<sup>5</sup> Bourdieu 1977a p72.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid* p76.



habitus. Although Bourdieu accepts the impossibility of *all* members of the same class having the same experiences in the same order, he nevertheless points out that 'each member of the same class is more likely than any member of another class to have been confronted with the situations most frequent for members of that class'.<sup>7</sup> He also suggests that habitus makes coherence and necessity out of accident and contingency: for example 'the equivalences it establishes between positions in the division of labour and positions in the division between the sexes are doubtless not peculiar to societies in which the division of labour and the division between the sexes coincide almost perfectly.'<sup>8</sup> In a class society, then, all the products of these agents will 'speak inseparably and simultaneously of his [or her] class – or more precisely his [or her] position in the social structure and his [or her] rising or falling trajectory – and his (or her) body, or more precisely, all the properties, always socially qualified, of which he or she is the bearer – sexual properties of course, but also physical properties, praised, like strength or beauty, or stigmatised'.<sup>9</sup> In such ways three core classification systems, always historically determined, are reproduced by the habitus – the structure of class relations, the structure of sex relations and the structure of age relations.<sup>10</sup>

The relatively autonomous universe of family relationships contains par excellence the sexual division of labour as well as 'domestic morality, cares, strifes, tastes' which are formed through economic and social necessity in particular historical circumstances and which are produced by a determinate class position; and it is here, in the early educational experiences of family life, that the child's habitus is formed. This 'habit-forming force' becomes the foundation of perception and appreciation in all subsequent experiences – educational action may transform the early training, but according to Bourdieu, it can never totally reverse its effects. In societies where education has not been institutionalised as a specific autonomous practice with specialised agents, pedagogic work takes place in a 'symbolically structured environment' by the whole group. Learning is then a process of acquiring *practical* mastery of the principles of the social formation. A social grammar of behaviour, thought, symbols and language is acquired through practical experience, without attaining a level of discourse (here referring to principles of abstraction and generalisation) which characterises *symbolic* mastery. The child imitates not 'models' but actions, acquiring a system of social meanings and values, a body language of gestures, postures and expressions, the use of implements and tools, a form of speech, a way of talking. In short, the child acquires a certain subjective experience of the social world which is *embodied* in the presentation of self as a physical and social being.

In thinking about pedagogy and sexuality, embodiment is one of Bourdieu's most valuable concepts. It directs analysis of cultural/symbolic

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7 *ibid* p85.

8 *ibid* p87.

9 *ibid* p87 [my additions].

10 'Social representations of the different ages of life, and of the properties attached by definition to them, express, in their own logic the power relations between age-classes, helping to reproduce at once the union and the division of those classes by means of temporal divisions tending to produce both continuity and rupture. They thereby rank among the institutional instruments for maintenance of the symbolic order, and hence among the mechanisms of the reproduction of the social order whose very functioning serves the interests of those occupying a dominant position in the social structure, the *men of mature age*' (*ibid* p165, my emphasis).

forms towards the creation of a physical as well as a social presence and identity as a political process." 'Embodiment' prevents the 'domestication of the body' being lost in a purely sociological account of socialisation. The awareness of the sexual classification of male and female within this analysis appears to be a primary element in the constitution both of self and furthermore of the social world; it also allows Bourdieu to integrate both social and sexual identities in his analysis of primary pedagogic work. Even more important, though, is Bourdieu's identification of the dialectic between the biological and social world, *the dialectic of embodiment and objectification*. In his investigation of the Kayble's symbolic system, he puts forward a theory of the structural homology between the sexual division of labour (in particular male and female functions in biological reproduction) and what he calls the mythico-ritual oppositions. Socially constructed categories such as masculine and feminine are not merely objectified in the classification of cultural phenomena, but are also embodied in the individuals operating that classification system. As Bourdieu explains:

'It is in the dialectical relationship between the body and a space structured according to the mythico-ritual oppositions that one finds the form par excellence of the structural apprenticeship which leads to the embodying of the structures of the world, that is, the appropriating by the world of a body thus enabled to appropriate the world. In a social formation in which the absence of the symbolic product-conserving techniques associated with literacy retards the objectification of symbolic and particularly cultural capital, inhabited space – and above all the house – is the principal locus for the objectification of the generative schemes; and, through the intermediary of the division and hierarchies it sets up between things, persons and practices, this tangible classifying system continuously inculcates and reinforces the taxonomic principles underlying all the arbitrary provisions of this culture.'<sup>12</sup>

Within the household/home, in the relationship particularly between the mother and the father, in their asymmetry and antagonistic complementarity, the child acquires the principles of both the *sexual division of labour* (the division between male and female forms of labour) and *division of sexual labour* (the division of labour in biological reproduction). Within the Kayble society, Bourdieu found homologous oppositions between the concepts of male and female, the right and left hands, religion and magic, external space (the place of assembly, market, the fields) and internal space (the house, the garden, the fountain). The classification of the social environment, of material objects, of time and space, reproduces in objectified form the biologically based yet socially constructed categories of sexual differences, and in particular the social definition of sexuality.

Individuals relate to each other according to the same principles as those governing the organisation of space, time and objects because they

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11 Bourdieu argues that physical bearing or *body hexis* is a political mythology realised. For example, sexual potency is inseparable from social potency. The manner of standing, speaking, coincides with a manner of feeling and thinking. Similarly language as an 'articulatory style' is a body technique which is one dimension of body hexis, ie the expression of one's relation to the social world.

12 Bourdieu 1977a p89.



are the product of the same generative schema. The child, experiencing his or her body and the social environment, aspires in terms of the same concepts 'the relationship between man and the natural world and the complementarity and opposed states and actions of the two sexes in the division of sexual work and the sexual division of work, and hence in the work of biological and social reproduction'.<sup>13</sup> One symbolic opposition which Bourdieu draws from the Kayble is between the *centrifugal* male orientation and the *centripetal* female orientation. This provides not only the principle for the organisation of domestic space but also the principle for the relationship of each of the sexes to their bodies and their sexuality. Such an opposition, he argues, can also be found in European societies dominated by male values which assign men to politics, history or war and a relation to their sexuality in terms of manly prowess and sublimation and women to the hearth, the novel and psychology and a relation to their sexuality which tends to exclude reference to specifically female sexual interests, dominated as it is by male values of virility. In Bourdieu's view, though, the relationship of individuals to their own and others' bodies cannot be treated as merely the product of sexuality. The body (defined biologically) and the natural world are 'set in order' by what Melanie Klein called a 'body geography' or cosmology. The child's initial encounter with its mother's and father's bodies is the experience both of biological *and* mythopoeic oppositions (like gender roles). As Bourdieu argues:

'The child constructs its *sexual identity*, the major element in its social identity, at the same time as it constructs its image of the division of work between the sexes, out of the same socially defined set of inseparably biological and social indices. In other words, the awakening of consciousness of sexual identity and the incorporation of the dispositions associated with a determinate social definition of the social functions incumbent on men and women come to hand with the adoption of a socially defined vision of the sexual division of labour.'<sup>14</sup>

Bourdieu ascribes to formal 'secondary pedagogic work' the confirmation and limited restructuration of the initial habitus, the individual's mental structure predetermined by early familiarisation with the structural hierarchies of class, sex and age relations. Within schooling, the practical mastery of such classifications, learned through domestic pedagogic work, is transformed into symbolic mastery of the abstract and generalisable principles of culture, language, tastes, style and so forth. The effectiveness of secondary pedagogy is a function of the distance between the type of early habitus and that transmitted by the school—so the domestic sexual division of labour is thus a crucial factor in the formation of the child's habitus and its ability to receive and appropriate the cultural message of the school. The implication of this theory is that, in terms of the sexual division of labour, the school can only reproduce sexual structures and has a very limited capacity for restructuration. Traditional visible pedagogies are based on the acquisition of strong individual identities which reinforce age and sex classifications. One only has to remember how traditional schooling differentiates pupils in terms of spatial organisation (segregated schools, seating arrangements), physical appearance (uniforms, clothes, etcetera).

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13 *ibid* p91.

14 *ibid* p93.

activities (sports, tasks, curriculum subjects) and manners (ways of talking, sitting, standing and so on), to recognise the likely impact upon the child's social and physical awareness of self. On the other hand, the many feminist teachers who believe that progressive education can change or diminish sex stereotyping would probably endorse Basil Bernstein's argument that invisible pedagogies 'are likely to weaken such classifications and inasmuch as they do this, they transform the concept of the child and the concepts of age and sex status.'<sup>15</sup>

Bernstein also suggests that the school can act back upon the family – that the relationship between the two institutions is interactive rather than unidirectional: 'to the extent that the infant/primary school fails to utilise age and sex as allocating categories *either* for the acquisition and progression of competencies *or* for the allocation of pupils to groups and spaces, the school is weakening the function of these categories in the family and the community.'<sup>16</sup> Such schooling would have an impact on the mother's domestic work, particularly in the upper classes. She will be encouraged to adopt a new pedagogic style (as in the professional organisation of play and activities) and new forms of interaction with her child (on the basis of the child's personality, for example, rather than a rigid model of patterns of growth and sexually stereotyped behaviour). J-C Chamboredon and J Prévot reach similar conclusions from their study of progressive French primary schools.<sup>17</sup> What remains unclear, though, is the effect these schools are likely to have on the domestic pedagogy of the working class mother. In his research on *Class and Conformity*, Melvin Kohn has found that gender distinctions (such as expectations of cleanliness, good manners and happiness for girls as against ambition, dependability and school success for boys) are more likely to be found in working class rather than middle class families. In particular, he discovered that 'working class mothers draw precise distinctions between what is behaviourally proper for boys and for girls' whereas these distinctions were largely irrelevant for the middle class mothers in his sample.<sup>18</sup> The distance between the habitus acquired by a child within a traditional household and that represented in a progressive primary school may be too great to have any real impact. For Bourdieu, then, the reformulation of gender and sex roles would depend on changes within the sexual division of labour in the home and so, in the final instance, in the economy.

The beneficial effects of 'progressive' schooling on sexual structures will also be constrained by its place in the educational system. This form of pedagogy is most common in schools staffed mainly by female teachers and

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15 Basil Bernstein 'Class and Pedagogies, Visible and Invisible' in *Class, Codes and Control Vol III* London, RKP 1975 p130. Bernstein distinguishes 'invisible' from 'visible' pedagogies by the following characteristics: (1) The control of the teacher over the child is implicit rather than explicit; (2) Ideally, the teacher arranges the *context* which the child is expected to re-arrange and explore; (3) Within this arranged context, the child apparently has wide powers over what he selects, over how he structures, and over the time-scale of his activities; (4) The child apparently regulates his own movements and social relationships; (5) There is a reduced emphasis upon the transmission and acquisition of specific skills; (6) The criteria for evaluating the pedagogy are multiple and diffuse and so not easily measured.

16 *ibid* p129.

17 J-C Chamboredon and J Prévot 'Change in the Social Definition of Early Childhood and the New Forms of Symbolic Violence' in *Theory and Society* v2 n3 1975 pp331-350.

18 M L Kohn *Class and Conformity* Chicago Press 1977 p22.



responsible for very young children – that is those closest to the traditionally female environment of the home. In cultivating ‘expressive spontaneity’, creativity and the development of personality rather than individuality, it emphasises what is regarded in our society as essentially female (emotional, inward looking, personal). Secondary schooling, in contrast, is oriented towards the *outer* (male) world of work, not inner development – it is centrifugal rather than centripetal. Its forms of legitimate knowledge are public, not private – factual knowledge is valued above personal experience. Thus there is a tension. Although progressive pedagogy may help to break down sexual stereotypes, the division between a primary ‘spontaneist’ approach and more authoritarian and ‘instrumental’ secondary education may actually reproduce the normative division between production (male) and consumption (female), between the male preserve of work and the female preserve of the family and domestic labour. In other words, the sexual division of labour is affirmed as the child acquires the principles underlying the classification of the two forms of pedagogy. This process of reproduction is reinforced by the sexual basis of teachers’ authority. Given the role of women in early pedagogic work (mothers and primary school teachers), Bernstein suggests that it is the middle class mother who ‘provides the model for the pre-school, infant school teacher.’<sup>19</sup> In the secondary and university sectors, the male model of authority prevails (as headteacher, professors) even where, as in secondary schools, there are large numbers of female teachers. Bourdieu actually quotes Freud as the source of the idea that the teacher’s authority is based on the concept of the father.

‘We understood now our relations with our teachers. These men, who are not even fathers themselves, became for us paternal substitutes. That is why they struck us as so mature, so inaccessibly adult, even when they were still very young. We transferred onto them the respect and hopes the omniscient father of our childhood inspired in us, and we started to treat them as we used to treat our fathers at home.’<sup>20</sup>

It is likely therefore that the child learns not merely its own placing in the sexual structure but also the principles governing sexual power relations – the equation of maleness with high status, dominance and authority. Against this, though, Chamboredon and Prévot argue that the division of labour between the sexes, particularly the assigning of cultural power to the woman and economic power to the man in the French upper classes, is one of the mechanisms ensuring the *integration* of the two forms of pedagogy.

‘The general trend towards the integration of a spontaneous liberalism and technocratic ideology within the upper class takes on a specific form in pedagogical matters. We would suggest that two main devices permit the resolution of potential between the trend towards spontaneity and the traditional more authoritarian tendencies. The first one is accomplished through the division of labour between sexes, the spontaneist elements being accorded to the feminine. The second is accomplished through relegating these elements to different stages of life and the school career, with the spontaneist elements being predominant during the period of preschool education.’<sup>21</sup>

19 Bernstein op cit p125.

20 Bourdieu and Passeron op cit pp19-20.

21 Chamboredon and Prévot op cit p334.

## The sexual habitus

To summarise, then, Bourdieu's structural analysis raises questions about three major aspects of the processes through which the sexual division of labour is culturally reproduced:

- 1) the internalisation (or embodiment) of the domestic divisions of labour together with the homologous symbolic classifications of tasks, objects, function, time and space mediated through the family and school contexts;
- 2) the structural reproduction of the male/female hierarchy and male dominance through the recognition of the sexual nature of teachers' authority at different levels of schooling and the different forms of pedagogy operating at these levels, in the transition from the domestic to the productive spheres;
- 3) the reproduction of the masculine/feminine social and sexual identities through different educations in instrumental/expressive skills, public/private knowledge, discipline/spontaneous creativity. Within this framework the impact and origins of the hierarchical stratification of academic disciplines in the context of both class and gender relations are also important.

Before looking at Bourdieu's account of how institutionalised schooling contributes to the reproduction of the socio-sexual division of labour, it is worth examining how useful the concept of habitus is in theorising the constitution of gender and sexuality. Its advantage (particularly for a feminist analysis) is that it brings together the psychoanalytic and the sociological factors in this process and, by positing a dialectic between the two levels of determination, avoids either biological determinism or purely ideological analysis. It also moves away from the subjective/objective dichotomy to an interactive relationship between the two forms of experience. Yet, however all-encompassing and complex the concept of habitus may seem, it still has limitations. The particular conjunctures of symbolic and material structures identifiable in Kayble society made it possible for Bourdieu to establish equivalences in sets of classification systems. But can such equivalences be discovered in a highly differentiated, class society? The model of primary pedagogic work within a non-class society needs to be refined before it could be applied to domestic pedagogy in families of different social classes. Given the lack of any centralised authority having the force to impose one set of legitimate definitions of gender, representations of sexuality or a particular domestic division of labour, such social constructs are the product of struggle – both class struggle and sexual struggle within the context of historically specific power relations.

These elements seem to be lost in Bourdieu's analysis, and he offers no account of social change in the cultural arena. The cultural reproduction of class and sexual identities appears to be a 'deep' unconscious process which, although materially determined, is unlikely to be broken. He seems to discount the possibility of change through recognising one's own habits of thought, perception and action, which potentially could lead to a radical programme of action for 'breaking' the sexual and economic divisions of labour instead of just restructuring them. Such an 'awakening' could only be the product of changed material circumstances, the causes of which remain unspecified. There are thus two dangers in using a concept such as habitus. The first is that it is hard to establish the nature of its existence and the forms it may take in different historical conjunctures. Instead of offering a theory of learning, Bourdieu deduces the impact on individuals'



consciousness of economic, symbolic and sexual structures; this crucial but untested deduction represents the weakest point in his theory of social order. Secondly, haunting his theory is the implication that any planned programme for change (through educational reform for example) can have little impact against such social determinism, whether it be class or sexual domination.

### Cultural capital

At the heart of Bourdieu's analysis of how formal schooling reproduces class inequalities and power is his concept of *cultural capital*. Again the family is crucial. Its position in relation to the class structure determines the form of cultural capital to be transmitted to the child, who inherits, through a process of 'familiarisation' and appropriation, not only particular linguistic and social competencies but such qualities as style, taste, manners and 'know-how' and also expectations about future chances, criteria of success and a particular relation to the dominant culture. Whereas a child born to the dominant class will have invested in it cultural 'funds' which can be exchanged for academic certificates and diplomas, working class children have no such cultural capital to 'bank' in an alien school culture which reproduces the 'cultural arbitrary' of another social class.

A striking feature of Bourdieu and Passeron's empirical research in *Reproduction* is that, by defining cultural capital in terms of the *father's* occupation and education, they seem to accept that either a woman has no class culture or that her culture is not a significant feature of family pedagogy. The implication is that the sexual division of labour in domestic pedagogy ensures that only the man's culture is communicated: hence that cultural heredity operates only through the male line. A second theoretical assumption of their research is that 'for each given social class there is 'an equal distribution of linguistic capital... between the sexes'<sup>22</sup> – that both sexes within one class have the same amount of cultural capital. Neither of these assumptions is tenable (as Bourdieu's own later work shows). Without going into the debates about 'maternal deprivation' and the effect of mothers on the development and personality formation of their children – or even about Bourdieu's own contention that women (especially in the upper class) have 'cultural power' – it is self-evident that the idea that women are 'invisible' and have no impact upon the child's cultural experience is unacceptable. Against the assumption that cultural competencies are shared equally between the sexes, Bourdieu and Passeron themselves argue that the *relationship* to culture is as important as its form. Thus, they point out, female students often reveal a 'feminine' relation to the dominant culture, stressing 'sensitivity to the imponderable nuances of sentiment or a taste for the imprecise preciousities of style.'<sup>23</sup> That is why they are more likely to choose the literary, artistic or humanistic disciplines designated as 'feminine'.

In assessing the objective possibilities open to them, women may also be affected by a lower level of cultural and economic investment in their education (which could limit their chances of school success, as defined by

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22 Bourdieu and Passeron op cit p81.

23 *ibid* p78.

the number and type of their examination certificates). They also face differential 'rates of conversion' of their diplomas on the academic and job markets. Their qualifications may be devalued as 'typically female' or allow access to occupations (like the teaching profession or social work) from which men have moved out, leaving them 'feminised'. In such ways, women's expectations of future possibilities are likely to be not only different from but 'lower' than men's. It is therefore necessary to qualify Bourdieu and Passeron's theory of reproduction to take account of the operation of the sexual division of labour in the creation and the nature of cultural capital.

In a more recent article, Bourdieu has analysed the relationship of the sexes to language, a crucial component of dominant culture. Because they have a 'special interest in symbolic production' (a feature he does not explain), women can identify with the dominant culture without cutting themselves off from their own class (if it is not the bourgeoisie); nor do they run 'the risk of their transformation being taken as a change in both their social and sexual identity.'<sup>24</sup> To explain the comparatively unproblematic relation of women from dominated classes to the dominant culture, Bourdieu argues that mobility is given as a reward for docility in a class society; at the same time, within a male dominated society, docility is represented as a dimension of an essentially 'feminine' social identity and a particular feminine relation to the body. Hence women who have acquired the socially prescribed disposition can relate to the dominant culture without negating their sexuality. Although this reasoning makes sense about women who associate domestic life with cultural activity (like the upper classes in France), it is unlikely that working class girls will easily adopt the bourgeois 'finesse' of school culture. The conformity integral to traditional stereotypes of 'femininity' is not necessarily part of their actual disposition. In her work with one group of working class girls,<sup>25</sup> Angela McRobbie has shown that their celebration of female sexuality (in clothes, make-up, going out with boys and so on) is part of an anti-school culture, a resistance to the culture and the discipline of schooling.

Whether the association of docility with feminine dispositions is correct or not, it is clear that the dominant culture – or rather the participation in it of people from outside the dominant class – is designated as feminine or effeminate. The opposition between spiritual or sublimated symbolic culture and language and material physical culture, Bourdieu argues, is 'more or less perfectly congruent with the taxonomy which organises the division between the sexes'. To acquire this dominant culture demands docility, a 'feminine' disposition. Thus biological (male/female) and gender (masculine/feminine) determinations 'exert their influence on linguistic (or sexual) practices and imagery through the structure of homologous oppositions which organise the images of the sexes and the classes.'<sup>26</sup> Given this set of equivalences in the biological and cultural oppositions, Bourdieu interprets the resistance of the working class male to the dominant culture as part of a class *and* sexual struggle. In acquiring dominant linguistic and cultural forms, what is at stake is not just the accusation of class disloyalty,

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24 Bourdieu 'The Economics of Linguistic Exchange' in *Social Science Information* v16 n6 1977b p661.

25 Angela McRobbie 'Working Class Girls and the Culture of Femininity' in *Women's Studies Group* op cit.

26 Bourdieu 1977b p662.



but also the negation or repudiation of masculine sexuality defined in terms of virility, pugnacity and self-assertion. Taking on bourgeois culture – a way of speaking, self-presentation through gesture, dress and so forth – also implies a particular relation to one's body – hence the different names for parts of the body (the femininity and daintiness of *la bouche* against the roughness and violence of *la gueule*) in bourgeois and working class speech. Recognising but *inverting* the classification between class cultures, says Bourdieu, working class men celebrate their masculine sexuality and their physical (manual) culture by punctuating their language with “coarse” and “crude” words and “broad and spicy” stories’.

Paul Willis has identified a similar process in his analysis of the relationship between forms of labour power and patriarchy in *Learning to Labour*. The working class ‘lads’ in his study were affirming their sexuality as well as their class identity through their resistance to the dominant school culture. In espousing manual labour and dismissing the ‘ear ‘oles’ as conformist, effeminate ‘cissies’, they inverted the hierarchical distinction of mental over manual labour by transposing it to the hierarchy of male and female. As Willis explains:

‘This important inversion, however, is not achieved within the proper logic of capitalist production. Nor is it produced in the division of labour spontaneously. It is produced in the concrete articulation on the site of social classes of two structures which in capitalism can only be separated in abstraction and whose forms have now become part of it. These are patriarchy and the distinction between mental and manual labour. *The form of the articulation is the cross-valorisation and association of the two key terms in the two sets of structures.* The polarisation of the two structures becomes crossed. Manual labour is associated with the social superiority of masculinity, and mental labour with the social inferiority of femininity. In particular manual labour is combined with a masculine tone and nature which renders it positively expressive of more than its intrinsic focus in work.’<sup>27</sup>

Thus both Bourdieu and Willis argue that the mode of production and class oppression are reproduced in part through the equivalence established between the mental/manual division of labour and between masculinity and femininity. This also, according to Willis, paves the way for the reproduction of male manual labour power within the working class. As for the reproduction of female manual labour, it is possible that by *inverting* the hierarchy of productive over domestic labour, working class girls prepare themselves for both unskilled, low-paid work and unpaid domestic service. In neither case, then, would working class men and women have to negate their culturally received sexual identity in the process of resisting class domination.<sup>28</sup> Boys ‘achieve manhood’ through hard physical work and girls ‘become women’ as wives and mothers. In both instances, forms of resistance to schooling which are based on the celebration of traditional sex-

27 Paul Willis *Learning to Labour* Farnborough, Saxon House 1977 p148.

28 Amongst the middle classes the equivalence between the gender hierarchy and the mental/manual distinction is the reverse of that found in the working class. At this level, the ‘mental’ work of planning and management is considered a masculine activity, whereas more ‘manual’ occupations (secretarial, for example) are designated ‘women’s work’; middle class women face the dilemma of trying to retain their ‘femininity’ in traditionally masculine occupations such as business, law and science.

ual identities paradoxically confirm the cycle of reproduction. They undermine neither the sexual nor the social division of labour.

What emerges most clearly from an analysis of pedagogy and sexuality based (critically) on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital is the intricacy of the relationship between the sexual division of labour (biologically and socially constructed), the social division of labour, and forms of language, education and culture. Instead of counterposing feminist and materialist approaches, this makes it possible to theorise the constitution of classed and sexed subjects as a complex process of social and cultural reproduction in which the two structures of patriarchy and capitalism are dialectically integrated. The programmatic implication is the need to investigate further both the significance of the structural characteristics of schooling in the reproduction of both sets of power relations, and also the contradictions and complexities of the interrelations between class and sexual structures within cultural formations. So it is at the level of understanding institutional and familial pedagogies – and the relations between the two contexts of transmission – that this work is most useful. It is less clear what Bourdieu's type of analysis can offer in terms of thinking about a direction or a strategy for 'radical pedagogy'. If anything, it may leave the teacher with a sense of powerlessness, unable to do more than collaborate in the 'restructuration' of social and sexual classifications and identities without being able to affect the material conditions which determine them. Although, as feminist and socialist teachers have argued, this is not a project to be dismissed, Bourdieu's implicit pessimism raises once again the question of the place of education in a broader political and cultural strategy.



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## *Schooling and the Reproduction of Class and Gender Relations*

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In 1967, Quintin Hoare wrote,

British education is from a rational point of view grotesque, from a moral one, intolerable and from a human one tragic . . . Predictably, the Labour Party has at no time offered a global challenge to the present system. It has at most stood for its expansion and the elimination of some of its most flagrantly undemocratic features. It has never seriously threatened the most important of these: the continued existence of the public schools and sexual discrimination against girls in every type of school. Above all, it has never attacked the vital centre of the system, the curriculum, the *content* of what is taught.<sup>1</sup>

In 1980 these remarks are still valid not just for the Labour Party, but also for sociologists of education. This may seem a curious statement to make, particularly given the development of sociology of the curriculum over the last decade and the more recent flowering of feminist analyses of schooling within the discipline. However, whilst the diversity and range of material is considerable and its critical stance not disputed, I shall argue in this paper first, that what is still lacking in the studies of the curriculum is that 'vital centre' – the *content* of school subjects. The sociology of school texts has been left a minimal element, squeezed between the blocks of macro and micro studies of school structures and processes. The analyses of the ideology of textbooks and of the visual and literary resources teachers daily refer to and use in the classroom have been left with little critical evaluation, apart from that of journalists concerned about the bias in such material. Second, although there is now more research on patterns of sexual discrimination in schools, this research still retains a marginal status. By and large, it has not been integrated into the 'radical' critiques of schooling which tend to weight theories of education towards class analysis. There has been a noticeable neglect of race and sexual structures in schooling, as integral and not subsidiary elements of capitalism. Interestingly, it is only when these latter hierarchies and inequalities are referred to, that there seems to be any need for the investigation of school texts. In these

contexts, educational materials are studied as potential sources of ideological representations and prejudice.

My concern in this paper with these two 'forgotten' subjects of school analysis is part of an attempt to answer the same central theoretical question. I am interested in the ways schooling may be involved in the processes of legitimation and hence of reproduction of class and gender relations under capitalism. (The complications which an analysis of racial hierarchies brings, requires another article). Here, I shall focus specifically on the structure and content of school culture as represented by the curriculum. The position I shall take is, first, that one cannot isolate out one sex or one social class. One has to remember that these categories exist within a set of social relations. In particular, the category of gender, which is socially constructed, only has meaning when the concepts of masculinity and femininity are recognised as a pair which exist in a relationship of complementarity and antithesis.

Simone de Beauvoir<sup>2</sup> describes this relationship by using a Hegelian distinction between Subject and Other. Man is the Subject, the absolute and woman is the Other. Within this duality, the definition of woman is constructed *relative* to man

The terms *masculine* and *feminine* are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of *man* to designate human beings in general, whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity.<sup>3</sup>

The assumption I hold is that both class relations and gender relations, while they exist within their own histories, can nevertheless be so closely interwoven that it is theoretically very difficult to draw them apart within specific historic conjunctures. The development of capitalism is one such conjuncture where one finds patriarchal relations of male dominance and control over women buttressing the structure of class domination. In a wide variety of 'sites' such as the work place, the family, the law and the educational system, there are the hierarchies of class and also of sex. Further, in so far as class relations (in other words the division between capital and labour) constitute the primary element of the capitalist social formation, they limit and structure the form of gender relations, the division between male and female properties and identities. I do not believe that one can dis-associate the ideological forms of masculinity and femininity, in their historical specificity, from either the material basis of patriarchy nor from the class structure. If one definition of femininity or masculinity is dominant, it is the product of patriarchal relations and also the product of class dominance, even though these two structures may exist in contradiction.

Within capitalism, the relations of class and gender take a unique form. They are brought together, for example, in the maintenance of capitalist social relations of production – where male dominance reinforces the authority of supervisors, managers and experts.<sup>4</sup> At a more fundamental level, the coincidence of these two structures facilitates the reproduction of the work force required by that mode of



production. Biological reproduction of workers occurs within a particular family mode, which is characterised in capitalism by a patriarchal household, monogamy, and a domestic sexual division of labor which delegates to woman the prime responsibility for child care and early education. Social reproduction of the work force occurs through the extension of this domestic division of labour (supposedly derived from the biological role of woman in childbearing) to the division, within capitalism, between social production and the domestic sphere. A correspondence is maintained between the public and male worlds and between the private and female realms. This coincidence, I would argue, is one of the major factors in the reproduction of the male and female work force which, in the capitalist mode of production, is organised largely along the lines of sex segregation. The division between work and the family represents a 'split' or separation between production of commodities for exchange and the production of use values such as food, garments etc., for consumption in the family. However, this becomes 'misrecognised' or falsely perceived when it appears that the division is based upon the 'natural instincts and interests' of men in work and women in the family. Thus, the usefulness for capital of this division, and the additional superior status attributed to productive work because of its 'masculine' association, is hidden in the ideology of sex differences.

What it is important to recognise is that the congruence of these two structures is not natural but socially imposed and, as a result, has to be continually reinforced through the legal, political and educational agencies of the state, if it is to be maintained.<sup>5</sup> The context of this imposition is that of bourgeois hegemony; of the attempt by the bourgeoisie to gain the consent of women to a definition of femininity which locates their primary role as keepers of the home with only secondary involvement in waged work. Also the consent of men has to be won to a definition of masculinity which involves their leaving their homes to go out to work and to be responsible for the family income. If such consent can be won, the ideological conditions are more likely to be ensured for the daily and generational reproduction of the wage labour force through the unpaid work of the wife and mother.<sup>6</sup> Also, the recruitment of working class women is facilitated because of their domestic commitments, into those occupations which require little skill, are badly paid, are often part-time and normally lack any prospects. Other advantages for capital also arise from this sexual division of labor across the divide of work and family life. Zaretsky<sup>7</sup>, for instance, suggests the psychiatric advantages of the family to capital by the alleviation of class aggression and alienation, through the 'hiving off' of the world of personal relations from the materialistic and harsh world of work. Women in the family become either a stabilising emotional force or alternatively the victims of male violence. Further, the State can be relieved of the responsibility of catering for such functions as early childhood care and education, sick nursing, care of the aged etc.. These can be delegated to the family and especially to women.

It is therefore within the context of bourgeois hegemony that we can understand the dominant pattern of state education where women have been implicitly oriented, if not overtly prepared, for domesticity and men for the world of work.<sup>8</sup> Whilst schooling, for men, has been directed largely towards the discipline of

the work place, the development of mass schooling for women has taken a different direction. As Davin<sup>9</sup> argues, if state education developed solely as a result of a need for a skilled work force or alternatively to educate a newly franchised working class politically, this could only explain the establishment of schools for men, as women did not fall into either category. Extending Johnson's<sup>10</sup> argument, that the school was meant to compensate for a morally deficient family (held responsible for the decay in society), Davin presents the view that,

a further aim of schooling was to impose on working-class children the bourgeois view of family functions and responsibilities. Education was to form a new generation of parents (especially mothers) whose children would not be wild, but dependent and amenable . . .<sup>11</sup>

The bourgeois form of family which schools were to establish as a 'stabilising force' was composed of the male breadwinner, the dependent housekeeping wife and dependent children. In her analysis of Board School readers of the turn of the century, Davin concludes that,

. . . it is worth noticing that their tendency, both through the behaviour they advocated – unselfishness, compassion, devotion to housewifely industry and family duty – and through the situations which they presented as natural to women, was to direct girls towards an exclusively domestic role, even at the expense of school.<sup>12</sup>

We can understand the social relations of schooling not just as attempts to prepare for class obedience but also to prepare women for their role, subordinate to men. In both the reproduction of the social relations of production and the work force, we must therefore recognise the *dual* locations of family and work, not just for women but for men as well. Education for one sphere has implications for men and women's roles within the other. For working class men the contradictions between these two worlds are clear: at school they learn to expect forms of control and discipline when they become workers but they also learn about the expected dominance of men in the home. In some way they have to balance and contextualise these two different behavioural repertoires. Working class women on the other hand experience dual forms of control, both as workers and as women, and also the contradictions of trying physically and emotionally to cope with both domestic and wage work. The role of schooling in the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production, I believe, is not therefore just to do with the reproduction of a work force through basic skill training, nor is it just to do with reproduction of the social relations of production through the hidden curriculum of discipline and authority. The work of the school facilitates the maintenance *in the long run* of the work force and the social relations of production through the transmission of a set of gender relations, its association with the division between domestic and waged labour, and all the contradictions this entails.

Care must be taken however, when generalising this to all stages of capitalist development. With the growth of corporate capitalism and the emergence of the welfare state we can see an increased intervention of the state and the economy



into the privatised world of the family. Patriarchy, as a set of power relations, may well conflict with the structure of advanced capitalism. This can be seen in the case of Sweden where the State has attempted, and yet failed, to combat sexual discrimination in families, the communities and the schools. The advantages to be gained by capital in the breakdown of patriarchal families would lie in the 'releasing' of married women from the home and domestic chores for waged work in the commodity production system.<sup>13</sup> Patriarchal structures in the families of different social classes, also may have different relations to the labour process and capital. Dorothy Smith<sup>14</sup>, for example, argues that the family of the managerial classes has been incorporated into the bureaucracies of corporate capitalism. The family of the business executive (and in particular his wife) now stands in what she called a 'subcontractual' relationship to the corporate enterprise, transmitting its culture and values and reflecting its authority structures. Humphries<sup>15</sup>, on the other hand, argues that historically the working class family stood in opposition to capital because in the protected world of home life the working class could maintain and transmit its own culture and values. The weakening not only of the boundaries between the family and the economy but also of the domestic division of labour amongst the middle classes has to some extent heralded in attempts to break down sex segregation in the schools and to construct and transmit a new set of gender relations, more appropriate for corporate capitalism.

The impression we have to keep is of the dynamics of class and gender relations through the development of capitalism but, more than that, it is also important to remember the existence of class and sexual struggle. The dualities of capital and labour and male and female, constitute not only social dichotomies but also hierarchies upon which both material and symbolic power is based. Inside these hierarchies the dialectics of class and sexual struggles are waged. If we wish to understand the role of schooling as one site of the reproduction of the socio-sexual division of labour, we must also be aware of the stakes of these *two* forms of struggle and their interrelations. Certainly there is now an interest in the forms of popular struggle over and in education, in forms of class resistance and the nature of the final compromises. However, this perspective has not really affected feminist analyses. There seems to be little recognition of sexual struggle particularly in the educational arena. If the history of education concerns winning the consent of women to their position in society, then surely there must also be a history of their dissent. There must be a history of women's fight for education not merely as a means of social mobility but also of sexual liberation. More than that, there must be a 'hidden' history of women's class struggle in and outside the classroom to resist and reject bourgeois definitions of femininity transmitted with such persistence through every cultural agency.

The analysis of class and gender relations requires, I believe, a theory of 'identity formation' – the patterns and processes which define, limit and transmit the range of models available to individuals to identify with. I make no assumption however that these structures will necessarily describe individual or group identities but I do assume that they will represent social priorities and the cultural framework within which individuals acquire a sense of themselves. The mistake, I believe,

that many theories of education make, is they assume that social identities are formed through the experience of cultural forms without ever testing this. The experience can be as little as 'contact', as active as 'consumption' such as the buying of a book or a record, or as deep as the process of 'unconscious internalisation' or 'acquisition' of structural principles. It is at this point that our theories of education are at their most deterministic and make their greatest theoretical leaps. The learner is either assumed to be passive or 'naked' in the sense of being unaffected or unformed by any previous experience, and therefore incapable of resisting social pressures. Further, what is noticeable is how often these theories assume that individuals are what they are supposed to become. The working class are often talked of as passive, quiescent, docile or uncritical because educationalists since the nineteenth-century have argued for such, or because the school is seen to be a place of discipline and control. Yet as Willis<sup>16</sup> so succinctly puts it, 'merely because capital would like to treat workers as robots does not mean they are robots'.<sup>17</sup> Similarly women in feminist accounts, whether they are sociological or historical, tend to take on the mantle of femininity and passivity without any struggle. In attempting to move away from biological determinism in the explanation of sex differences, such theories often fall into the trap of *social* determinism. There is a sense in which, in feminist writings, women are 'oversocialised'. Take for example, this statement by Simone de Beauvoir,

The passivity that is the essential characteristic of the 'feminine' women is a trait that develops in her from the earliest years. But it is wrong to assert a biological datum is concerned; it is in fact a destiny imposed upon her by her teachers and by society.<sup>18</sup>

The formation of identity is a highly complex process which cannot be *assumed* to be successful at either the conscious or unconscious levels of learning. Ideally what we need is an analysis not just of the production and transmission of cultural messages but also the reception of cultural messages before we can judge the impact of these forms. Further, it is important to understand the part played by school culture in a wider context. In an age of mass media and a wide variety of cultural agencies, we can no longer justify concentrating upon schools, in isolation, as the sole or even dominant creator of meanings, class and sexual identities and consciousness. We need to investigate the relationship between 'external' cultural resources and internal school culture in both its complementary and antagonistic aspects. As Bernstein<sup>19</sup> has already pointed out, the consciousness of the ruling class and the consciousness of the working class are less likely to be dominated by the mode of education than by the mode of production. In contrast it is the consciousness of the new middle classes (called by Bernstein the agents of symbolic control) which is constituted by the mode of education and only indirectly by the mode of production. This view is supported by Willis who argues that the distinction between work and culture must be broken down particularly in the analysis of male working class identities. He claims,

... not only can work be analysed from a cultural point of view, but it must occupy a *central* place in any full sense of culture. Most people spend their



prime waking hours at work, base their identity on work activities and are defined by others essentially through their relation to work.<sup>20</sup>

To recap: I have argued, first, that any analysis of class and gender relations in schooling must recognise the historical specificity of definitions of masculinity and femininity. They are socially constructed categories and power relations which are contained within, and defined by, the structure of class relations. In educational institutions one is likely to find, therefore, the imposition of gender definitions which are integral to the culture of the ruling class (e.g. aristocratic or bourgeois concepts of masculinity and femininity). These definitions represent one aspect of their effort to exert hegemonic control through schooling. Second, I have argued that there must be recognition of the forms of class and sexual struggle in terms of educational provision and in the processes of class and sexual identity formation through culture. Third, I have argued that one of the ways class and gender relations are produced under capitalism is through the separation of domestic and wage labour and its reproduction in schools.

In the next section of this paper, I shall go back to the sociology of the curriculum to try and draw out elements of a theory of class and gender relations. The analysis will be of necessity, exploratory. I shall concentrate on the structure of school culture first, and then move on to school texts.

The first body of theory I shall look at is that of cultural reproduction, to see what a structuralist account of class and gender relations in schooling could look like. Within this category one can place Basil Bernstein's theory of educational codes and Pierre Bourdieu's work on cultural codes.<sup>21</sup> The theme here, is that culture has, through education, been divided into two categories – the legitimate and the illegitimate. This dichotomy also reflects the division between public and private knowledge, between culture and common sense, between school knowledge and family and community experience. Further, the transmission through educational institutions of specific forms of culture not merely ensures the reproduction of that culture but also of the class structure it supports. Culture according to Bourdieu symbolically

reproduces in transfigured and therefore unrecognisable form, the structure of prevalent socio-economic relationships – it produces a representation of the social world immediately adjusted to the structure of socio-economic relationships which are consequently perceived as natural, so contributing to the symbolic buttressing of the existing balance of forces.<sup>22</sup>

The structural division and relations between forms of knowledge, according to Bourdieu and indeed Bernstein as well, is a far more significant aspect of the formation of social identities than the *actual* selection of knowledge and *its* hidden message. What is important is the acquisition of the rules and principles which govern the structural hierarchies of culture. Indeed for Bernstein<sup>23</sup> the word 'content' signifies merely how a period of time is filled in the school timetable. Thus a curriculum is

defined 'in terms of the principle by which certain periods of time and their contents are brought in to a special relationship with each other'.<sup>24</sup> What is central to Bernstein's analysis is whether a school subject has high or low status, whether it is compulsory or optional and what relation it bears to other subjects in terms of the strength or weakness of its boundaries.

In both Bernstein's and Bourdieu's structuralist accounts of schooling, social identities are formed through a process of internalisation of three core classifications – those of age, sex and social class. The structures of age relations, sex relations and class relations are to be found, for example, in the family, the school and the work place. While their analyses of these classifications and their interrelations remain underdeveloped, one can still see what direction that analysis might take if we look at Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.<sup>25</sup> In this study of the Kayble society, in Algeria, Bourdieu identified structural correspondences between the sexual division of labour and symbolic oppositions.<sup>26</sup> The categories of masculine and feminine were found *objectified* in the dichotomies of the right and left hands or the division between religion and magic, between external space such as the market and the fields and internal space – the home. When the child learns to use these structural divisions of gender and their objectified form in the divisions of time, space and objects, according to Bourdieu, he or she also constructs his or her social identity. This social identity is composed first of a sexual identity which is learnt through simultaneously experiencing the mother's and father's body as well as the sexual division of labour within the home. It is also made up by a whole system of social meanings and values, a body language of gestures, postures, and a physical bearing (what Bourdieu calls body hexis), a form of speech and a language. The child experiencing the structural organisation of the economic, the social and the cultural, will learn to relate to his or her own body, to other individuals and to nature according to the same principles. For the female child among the Kayble for example the experience is one of learning 'inner-directedness' or what Bourdieu called a *centripetal* orientation. The male child, by contrast, will be outer-directed – he will have a *centrifugal* orientation which will be expressed in the outward displays of virility and by his involvement in work, politics and war. The process is what Bourdieu called *embodiment*, which determines not merely the child's social identity but also his or her physical and sexual presence.

In terms of the relevance of this account for an analysis of institutionalised education, we need to ask the following questions. Is it possible to identify similar *dialectics of embodiment and objectification* in the culture of a class society? Is there any reality in talking of correspondences between the structure of gender relations, of masculinity and femininity and the divisions of school knowledge? In the world of formal education, it is certainly not difficult to identify numerous sets of oppositions which divide and distance forms of knowledge and their associated activities. For example, we can find the dichotomies of public and private knowledge, politics and psychology, reason and emotion, science and art, technology and nature, reality and fantasy. Further, as Spender<sup>27</sup> has noticed, there are also the methodological distinctions between hard and soft data, objectivity and subjectivity. The difficulty is of judging, at more than a common sense level, the relationship of



these classifications to the social definitions of masculinity and femininity. As Roberts put it,

How polarisation and dichotomisation affect thought systems is still open to much consideration. The 'we and they', the 'foe and friend', the 'reward and punishment' – the ubiquitous and fallacious paired opposites are obvious. What is unclear is the extent to which social sex polarisation provides the basis of such dualistic thinking.<sup>28</sup>

Certainly much of the literature on school subjects and sex segregation within the school, places great emphasis on the fact that some subjects are perceived of as either masculine or feminine. The 'masculinity' of science or the 'femininity' of domestic science can be seen as contributing to the unwillingness of girls to choose the former and of boys to study the latter.<sup>29</sup> The question is, how does such characterization occur which limits the range of choice of school subjects for the different sexes? Is it purely through the unconscious manipulations of teachers using restricted gender definitions or is it the effect of the different patterns of men and women's employment? Certainly both might enter the hidden curriculum of the school and affect the students' choice of subject. Bourdieu<sup>30</sup> suggests that the process of gender attribution to both students and academic disciplines is dialectical. The transference of femininity, for example, from the student to the school subject and back again to the student exemplifies the dialectic of objectification and embodiment.

... the objective mechanisms which channel girls preferentially towards the Arts faculties and within them, towards certain specialities (such as modern languages, art history or French) owe part of their effectivity to a social definition of the 'feminine' qualities which they help to form; in other words, to the internalisation of the external necessity imposed by this definition of feminine studies. In order for a destiny, which is the objective product of the social relations defining the female condition at a given moment in time, to be transmuted into a vocation, it is necessary and sufficient that girls (and all those around them, not least their families) should be unconsciously guided by the prejudice... that there is an elective affinity between so-called 'feminine' qualities and 'literary' qualities such as sensitivity to the imponderable nuances of sentiment or a taste for the imprecise preciousities of style.<sup>31</sup>

In this description of the process, women's educational route becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy once one has imposed a specific definition of femininity. The question which one has to ask is, 'How do academic disciplines or school subjects change their gender?'. Why do some subjects change from appearing as masculine to being viewed as essentially feminine (such as the social sciences) or alternatively change in the other direction (for example, education)? The answer must lie, to a great extent, in the pressures exerted on the school and universities by the changing pattern of employment of men and women in the labour force. However, the attribution of gender to specific subjects is also part of class culture and its operation

in the school is, I shall argue, one of the means for legitimating the structure of class domination.

In the family, the child learns the class-based definitions of masculinity and femininity, as well as a certain sexual division of labour. When the child enters the school this experience is challenged by a very specific set of gender relations – what I shall call, following Bernstein, a gender code.<sup>32</sup> The school's gender code sets up the categories of masculine and feminine as well as the boundaries and relations of power between them. While variations of the dominant gender code are possible in different types of school,<sup>33</sup> what is transmitted is essentially the form of gender relations which is specific to the ruling class. It represents the morality of the bourgeoisie, it legitimates in its ideal family form, as Davin<sup>34</sup> argued, the bourgeois family. In this sense, we can see the work of the school as involving the process of what Bernstein called *re-contextualising*, where the familial form of gender relations is converted into that of the dominant class. Because of this process the concepts of masculinity and femininity can be found to vary in different historic periods within schooling, affecting both the provision and the 'image' of school subjects. According to Bernstein, the informal everyday experience and everyday communication within the family and peer groups which shape social identities feed into and 'create procedures and performances fundamental to formal education. However, formal education also selects, and re-focusses and abstracts from such experiences and in so doing de-contextualises it'.<sup>35</sup> The process begins with this de-contextualising of the behaviours and competences invoked in the contexts of the home and community. They are thus freed from their dependence on these evoking contexts and, through a process of re-contextualising, become generalisable and abstract. Thus the 'practical mastery'<sup>36</sup> acquired through imitation of actions in the home, is converted, if the process is successful, into 'symbolic mastery' of the school discourses. One of the aspects of this process in the context of class society, is the re-contextualisation of definitions of masculinity and femininity into the class-based, and hence arbitrary, classification of school knowledge. The notions of appropriate behaviours for each sex is converted into the appropriate academic disciplines. Despite the actual availability of all subjects, girls and boys of different classes learn the new ideology of sex differences which mixes a theory of biological sex differences with expected gender differences of intelligence, ability, interests and ambitions, making it appear 'natural' that boys and girls should study different school subjects.

The process of re-contextualising, even of de-contextualising, may, however, not always be effective, especially where the family structure and culture differs considerably from the school. Let us look for a moment at the distinction between mental and manual labour which is integral to the capitalist labour process. In bourgeois culture it is transposed with the hierarchy of male over female – in other words mental labour is equated with the masculine and manual work or practical skills with the female. The dominant gender code within school is likely to transmit this pairing of two hierarchies. However, as Willis<sup>37</sup> has shown in *Learning to Labour*, working class boys confronted with this dual structure have two choices – either they conform, with the result that they lose credibility with their own class



and deny their masculine sexuality or, they can reject the message of the school. Significantly, the conformist or 'ear'ole' is labelled as effeminate or cissy. The 'lads' on the other hand, in their resistance to bourgeois culture, invert the school hierarchy of mental over manual, celebrating the manual and physical working class masculinity. This inversion is in line with the 'lads', family culture and in particular with that of their fathers. Thus, in resistance, 'manual labour is associated with the social superiority of masculinity, and mental labour with the social inferiority of femininity.'<sup>38</sup> On the shop floor, as well, this convergence of manual labour with masculinity has political repercussions.

... where the principle of general abstract labour has emptied work of significance from the inside, a transformed patriarchy has filled it with significance from the outside. Discontent with work is turned away from a political discontent and confused in its logic by a huge detour into the symbolic sexual realm.<sup>39</sup>

The failure of the school to 're-contextualise' the masculinity of these 'lads' into academic rather than physical displays, has reinforced the probability of their occupational destiny and the diffusion of their class discontent. On the other hand, those 'ear'oles' who conformed have been swept into acceptance of bourgeois culture. In both cases, the resolution of the conflict between sexual and class identities and school culture helps contain opposition to school order and, later, to the class divisions of the mode of production.

In the case of working-class girls, the classification of mental work as male and manual work as female, is less problematic as it is often reinforced rather than resisted by the family culture. We must however, be careful to distinguish between the application of the 'manual' category to working class and middle class women. In the case of the working class, manual labour either refers to the form of waged labour practised by this group of women or alternatively to their unpaid domestic labour. In this case the school will legitimate the equating of domesticity, of marriage and of motherhood with femininity. For the middle class girl, manual labour can either mean skilled work in secretarial or administrative occupations or alternatively the more 'practical' professions such as social work or nursing. The forms of class resistance to the imposition of bourgeois definitions of femininity by working class women takes the form of exaggerated celebration of domestic life and the over-emphasis of 'female' interests. Paradoxically the work of Willis, McRobbie and Sharpe<sup>40</sup> has shown that these forms of class resistance to the school, which involve the celebration of working class definitions of masculinity and femininity, have confirmed rather than broken down the cycle of class reproduction. *They undermine neither the sexual nor the social division of labour.* In both cases, mental labour and the high status and high income professions, are delegated and legitimated as the preserve of the male bourgeoisie and to a lesser extent the female bourgeoisie. The formation of sexual identities in the home and the school are therefore critical elements of the reproduction of the class structure.

In summary, I have argued in this section that specific sets of symbolic classifications represent the essence of bourgeois culture. Further underlying these



hierarchies of knowledge, together with their associated 'gender', is the attempt by that class to 'win the consent' through schooling of the working class to the dominance of capital, and to win the consent of women to the sexual division of labour in which men dominate.

Let us now turn to the analysis of school texts. These texts represent a system of choices from the 'external' culture – whether we are talking about a body of literature, a range of photographs, a set of experiments drawn from the science departments of universities, or history textbooks produced by educational publishers. Despite the diversity of resources available to teachers, the research on school texts reveals a pervasive ideology – that of legitimacy of the *status quo*. This message, according to Gerard MacDonald<sup>41</sup> has become hidden in school textbooks which once were the vehicle for an overt ideology of conservatism based on religion.

Textbooks present a particular ideological position which can best be described as the politics of stasis. The existing order, whether natural or social, is presented as what Marx calls an 'exterior fatality'. Textbook knowledge glosses or ignores the extent to which our world is a human project. It does not help towards either real understanding or real alternatives. Resigned quiescence is no longer an overt message in textbooks. Instead it has become their hidden agenda.<sup>42</sup>

School texts are characterised by their 'untouchable' and apolitical nature. They are received as the truths of a 'declassified' cultural heritage. Whether we are talking about science (Young)<sup>43</sup> or social science (Whitty)<sup>44</sup> or literature (Hand)<sup>45</sup> or music (Vulliamy)<sup>46</sup>, the analyses show the uncritical orientation of texts towards both the selection of 'facts' and their presentation within an ideology which leaves unchallenged the *status quo*. Children, if working-class, are faced with a presentation of the real world which does not correspond to their 'lived' experience or alternatively with a view of the world as far too stable to be amenable to active reform.

What characterises most of the literature in the politics of school knowledge, is the examination of the social relations of learning in which school texts are employed. The effect of such texts is found to lie in the alienation of the working-class child not merely from the school and the realms of high culture but also from his or her own lived experience outside the school. When the music, the literature and the insights learned from the family and community are given secondary status within the school, when the child's language and culture are treated as 'illegitimate' and the message of the classroom is that there is only one definition of truth and that is to be found in the textbooks, then class domination is at its strongest. Through the authority of teachers, the legitimacy of examination syllabuses and the social and material rewards which accompany scholastic success, the child, it is argued, learns the reality of a class society, even if unconsciously. Yet while the force of these analyses makes disbelief difficult, what one must ask, is the nature of the ideology which is transmitted through these texts? Is there no attempt to form social identities? Is it really the case that the working class child



is unlikely to acquire any sense of identity – only alienation – from school? There is little analysis of the actual representations of social class in texts which makes it extremely difficult to answer this question. Even Hardy's article on *Textbooks and Classroom Knowledge*,<sup>47</sup> is more concerned with the changing *form* of textbooks which have moved from presenting a body of knowledge to be taught to a new emphasis on the teaching of concepts and the development of understanding and activities. Most of the research on the content of school texts (rather than the form) has aimed at identifying potential sources of sexism and racism.

In terms of sexism, there are a number of studies of school and university texts which use several different methodologies – some quantitative and some qualitative. What they have in common is their interest in identifying the ways in which gender, and in particular women, are represented. If anything, most of the studies, especially the quantitative research, tend to assume the existence of a sexual division of labor and look for its representation in the subject matter. Also they search for consistency, rather than diversity, of images of women with the result that they identify the existence of sex role stereotypes and gender stereotypes. In addition, there is little concern with class analysis so that the overall impression is that cultural forms exist purely within a patriarchal society without any impact from capital's involvement and control over agencies of cultural production. Whereas the sociology of school knowledge, described above, has neglected, by and large, this source of cultural domination and sexual oppression, feminist analysis of school culture and the mass media has, to a considerable extent, neglected the forms of class control in the production and transmission of knowledge.

The picture which emerges from these exploratory and rather descriptive studies is, nevertheless, not only interesting but also very depressing. While we might have thought that the gains won by women in political, economic and sexual spheres would be reflected in the cultural media, if anything, this research shows just how deeply embedded are sexual ideologies and how 'conservative'. The impression gained is one of women's inferiority, her domesticity, her lack of intelligence, ability, sense of adventure or creativity. In the studies undertaken in the United States (where the majority of content analysis is found) and Britain, the analyses of school texts in, for example, domestic science,<sup>48</sup> history,<sup>49</sup> and literature<sup>50</sup> are complemented by those at university level in such disciplines as sociology,<sup>51</sup> anthropology,<sup>52</sup> psychology,<sup>53</sup> political science,<sup>54</sup> and community studies.<sup>55</sup> The message is still the same – there is a consistent distorted model of woman which not merely misrepresents her activities in social life but does nothing to correct the social patterns of discrimination. From the fantasy world of children's books<sup>56</sup> to the male bias of academic disciplines which purport to be 'value-free', one finds a persistent pattern of representations of women which can only be construed as the ideological wing of patriarchy. This pattern has three basic elements:

1. Women suffer from invisibility – which one author called her 'symbolic annihilation'. Women are absent actors in the histories of Western civilisation. They do not appear as active participants in such diverse fields as history, politics, literature, drama or art. Except for the heroine who portrays the individualised



rather than the collective struggles of women, most women are present in passive roles.

2. When women do appear, they are generally in low status or 'second-rate' jobs. The occupations they fill are most likely to be traditional, limited in prospect and narrow in range. Even in children's reading schemes, in the world of fantasy, women's prospects are not much better. Lobban,<sup>57</sup> for example, found in her study of children's readers that, in contrast to the thirty-three occupations shown for adult men, only eight were available for adult women – mum, granny, princess, queen, witch, handywomen about the house, teacher and shop assistant. However, what is more important is that women do not appear in employment nor in typically female jobs in the ratio in which they are actually found in the economy. If anything there is an under-representation of women in paid work with an over-representation of their financial dependence on men. Spence<sup>58</sup> noticed this in the case of British magazine photographs:

The visual representation of women as not having to work, as the glamorous property of men, harks back to the tradition of bourgeois painting. It effectively displaces the idea that women *do* work, and so inhibits their sense of themselves as workers. In fact according to the Equal Opportunities Commission, women make up 37 per cent of the paid work force.<sup>59</sup>

The image of the female is no less arbitrary and distorted. What is interesting is that the differences between the sexes appears to increase as they move from childhood to adulthood. Take for example Dohrmann's conclusions<sup>60</sup> from a study of children's educational television programmes:

The male child is accorded the most laudable pattern: ingenuity, achievement, bravery-rescue. The female child, while rewarded and achieving, is also a follower, an object of insult, and helpless. The adult female is even more uniformly passive, adding routine service, incompetence, and admiration of others to her behavioural repertory. The adult male excels in rewarding, performing occupationally-related tasks, putting others down and picking them up in the rescue role.<sup>61</sup>

3. There is an over-riding emphasis on women's domesticity. The message comes across not as any subtle or hidden code but rather with a degree of repetition that can only be described as ideological bombardment. The assumption first of all appears to be that women have never left the home and, if they had, it must have been unwillingly. This is then limited even further by the portrayal, for example, of women in advertisements selling the products of those two 'feminine' locations in the home – the kitchen and the bathroom.<sup>62</sup>

This pattern can be traced from television drama to commercials, from newspapers to magazines to comics.<sup>63</sup> Against this background of cultural invasion into the home and the community, the school takes its place as just one competitor for the right to present the legitimate gender model which the child is encouraged to follow. In the United States, it is already the case that young children spend more time watching television than in school. Thus we cannot say that the message



of the school is the only source of class and sexual identity formation nor, indeed, necessarily the dominant one. Yet the amount of time and effort spent on school texts is considerably greater than that spent on a short television programme, a once read magazine, a glanced at advertisement in the street. What we can suggest is that the message of school texts is most likely to represent in its purest form the ideological statement of the ruling class or, at least, those values which it considers essential to transmit. Because of this, I believe, it is extremely important that we analyse school texts in all their variety.

The tools for such analysis are being developed to a large extent outside the sociology of education. It is impossible to delve too deeply here into the vast body of literature which covers content analysis, semiotics, cultural histories etc. However, what I would like to do is to make some observations and draw some conclusions from this research. First, what is interesting about this research on culture is that it reveals a considerable split between the world of the family and that of work. Certainly, the equation between women and the home and men and public life appears to be carried in most media. If any message exists, it is the ideology of this division. Cultural texts are therefore, a further 'site' for the reproduction of the 'dual spheres', reinforced not just by the ascription of gender to each sphere but also by the re-contextualising of masculinity and femininity in each setting. For example, the image of the women in the daytime serial in the United States was found to be different to that shown in the evenings. The image offered to the housewives in the day time represented one of the strongest characterisation of women on television.

The woman of the daytime serial is above all a human being. She is liked and respected by her male acquaintances not merely sought as an adjunct to male activities and interest. She is a responsible member of a family structure, exercising judgement and offering support to parents and children alike. Her opinions are solicited and acted upon. She enjoys the friendship of other women.<sup>64</sup>

In television commercials in the States, another difference was noticed in the portrayal of masculinity. In this vivid description, one finds the distinction between the image of the man at home and the man in the world outside.

The image of the American man in TV commercials as muscular, knowledgeable, dominating, independent, sexy, cosmopolitan, athletic, authoritative and aggressive exists only when he is seen away from his family. In embarrassing contrast the American father and husband is portrayed as passive and stupid, infantile and emasculated . . . But outside the house, trouble is what he is looking for. Swift as a panther, stealthy as a cougar, free as a mustang he speeds to his rendezvous with status, independence and violence.<sup>65</sup>

The definitions of femininity and masculinity which we find in cultural texts are not then simple, homogenous stereotypes but rather ideological products which, if they are pulled together with all their contradictions into a coherent pattern,



represent one aspect of bourgeois hegemony. The existence of a dominant gender code does not however rule out the possibility of dominated or subordinated codes which reshape the dominant message of patriarchy into the requirements of specific audiences. This process of re-contextualising *within* one cultural form can be seen most clearly in Frith and McRobbie's research<sup>66</sup> into popular forms of music. Here, without all the statistical manipulations of content analysis, they identify two 'ideological' models of gender relations. The first exists in rock music primarily for a male audience. Masculinity is portrayed by the 'rampant destructive male traveller, smashing hotels and groupies alike . . .'. Women, in the eyes of these men, are

either sexually aggressive and therefore doomed and unhappy or else sexually repressed and therefore in need of male servicing. It's the woman, whether romanticised or not, who is seen as possessive after a husband, anti-freedom the ultimate restriction.<sup>67</sup>

Teenybop music in contrast, played to a largely female audience of housewives and female factory workers, presents a different model of sexuality. As the authors argue,

If cock rock plays on conventional concepts of male sexuality as rampant, animalistic, superficial, just-for-the-moment, teenybop plays on notions of female sexuality as being serious, diffuse and implying total emotional commitment . . . It is men who are soft, romantic, easily hurt, loyal and anxious to find a true love who fulfils their definition of what female sexuality should be about?<sup>68</sup>

Frith and McRobbie argue that within each musical form one can find a range of models or definitions of sexuality, mediated by the words of the song, the rhythms and beat of the music, the packaging and image of the singer or group. What their analysis reveals is the complexity of the ideological struggle to define and contain sexual identities within the framework of class culture.

This complexity can also be found in McRobbie's<sup>69</sup> analysis of the school girl magazine *Jackie*. Here she uses semiology to provide a method for such research, a form of analysis which has become increasingly popular in cultural studies. The advantages of this form of analysis are that it has

more to offer than traditional content analysis if only because it is not solely concerned with the numerative *appearance* of content, but with the messages which such 'contents' signify . . . Quantification is therefore rejected and replaced with understanding media messages as *structured wholes* and combinations of structures, polarities and oppositions are endowed with greater significance than their mere numerative existence.<sup>70</sup>

As a result, she is able to draw out five different subcodes of femininity which relate to beauty, fashion, popmusic, personal/domestic life and romance. What is important here is that the magazine is examined not just as a social product but also as an active agent in the *production* of new meanings. The problem therefore is not



one of trying to fit these representations of women to the realities of their lives but rather to recognise the ideological 'work' carried out by these texts in the *reconstruction* rather than the reproduction of gender definitions and relations.

By analysing the combinations of various representations of femininity or masculinity within one set of texts, one is also more likely to be made aware of the contradictions which can arise between different gender definitions. Take for example, the contradictory sets of female ideals; the capable consumer housewife versus the dependent incapable wife; the insatiable temptress and the passive sex object; the all embracing earth mother versus the childlike doll. Another example can be found in the excellent analysis of 1950s texts in three domains of motherhood, education and sexuality by the Birmingham Feminist History Group.<sup>71</sup> Here they located the ideological struggle between the liberal concept of equal opportunity and the bourgeois ideal of separate spheres for each sex, which was resolved in the 1950s in the ideology of the two sexes being 'equal but different'. Further they identified the contradictory pressures upon married women both to return to work and to act as efficient and dedicated wives and mothers. Thus the apparent 'unity' of the 1950s under their scrutiny, collapsed into 'contradictions, tensions and divisions'. They found that

... There was no one representation of women; but the struggle for primacy of one set of representations concerned with marriage, home and family, is systematically victorious throughout our period.<sup>72</sup>

What I have argued is that not only must we be aware of the complexity of definitions of gender relations in culture but that we must recognise the role of culture within hegemony. The question I believe we should be asking is not just what relation do the representations found within texts bear to 'lived' relations but also what is the relevance of that message for capital. The struggle to define and contain sexuality, is no less a problem for capital than containing the force of class opposition and preparing the working class for the rigours of the work place. Indeed, as Gramsci<sup>73</sup> argues in the notes on 'Some aspects of the sexual question', the two facets of hegemony are often inextricably linked. Sexual relations, the definitions of morality, of masculinity and femininity are historically constructed under immense odds. First, according to Gramsci,

The history of industrialism has always been a continuing struggle (which today takes an even more marked and vigorous form) against the element of 'animality' in men. It has been an interrupted, often painful and bloody process of subjugating natural (animal and primitive) instincts to new more rigid norms and habits of order, exactitude and precision which can make possible an increasingly complex form of collective life which are the necessary consequence of industrial development.<sup>74</sup>

Sexual instincts have undergone the greatest degree of repression from society, according to Gramsci. Within this history, the 'aesthetic' ideal of women has oscillated between the concept of 'brood mare' for reproduction and 'dolly' for sport and pleasure. The biological reproduction of the work force necessary to



support an 'unproductive' sector of the population (due to age and ill health) is one of the problems connected with women's position. If this ratio is unbalanced, then a further problem for hegemony is posed.

The history of hegemonic control over relations between the sexes, has been fraught with crises which have affected mainly the middle classes and sectors of the ruling class. After each period of puritanism, Gramsci argues, there is a crisis of libertinism which only marginally affects the working class – through the depravement of their women. However, what is important in Gramsci's argument is that gender relations, or more specifically sexual relations, are linked to the methods of production and patterns of work within a mode of production. For example, he links the relative stability of sexual unions among the peasants to the system of agricultural work in the countryside. With the introduction of Fordism, the rationalisation of work, Gramsci argued, made it important that the working class hold a new sexual ethic – that of monogamy.

The truth is that a new type of man demanded by the rationalisation of production and work cannot be developed until the sexual instinct has been suitably regulated and until it too has been rationalised.<sup>75</sup>

Rigorous discipline of work demands discipline of the sexual instincts and with it, according to Gramsci, comes the strengthening of the ideology of the family and the stability of sexual relations. The reason for the 'puritanical' initiatives of the industrialists, such as Ford, into working class families (controlling the consumption of alcohol and 'womanising') could be found in the necessity of reproducing the work force in fit-state for the discipline of the new work methods. Capital needed to preserve 'outside of work, a certain psycho-physical equilibrium which prevents a physiological collapse of the worker, exhausted by the new methods of production'.<sup>76</sup>

In these brief notes Gramsci argues that not only are the relations between the sexes historical products, related to the development of capitalism, but also that these relations are areas in which consent has to be won. To create and make new moralities 'second nature', to win consent for the arbitrary division of social life into male and female worlds of public and private activities is no easy task and perhaps that is why there is such ideological bombardment from educational and cultural agencies of the state. It is not that capital has *succeeded* in creating classed and sexed subjects, suitably adjusted to the rigours of work in the home and the work place, but rather that no day can go by without it *trying*.

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# 4.

## Culture and Political Economy: Dual Perspectives in the Sociology of Women's Education

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Research into gender and more particularly girls' and women's education is not, despite what one might expect given the recent growth of feminist research, all that new a research interest. In the 1950s, for example, several sociologists and psychologists, particularly in the United States, were researching the formation of sex role stereotypes, identities, and behaviour patterns. By the 1960s, sex differences in educational careers, teachers' attitudes towards the sex of their pupils, and differences in the academic achievement, performance in intelligence tests and behaviour in classrooms of boys and girls, were firmly established on the American academic agenda where quantitative research was a useful tool for the observation, rather than the explanation, of sex differences. In Britain however, the analysis of gender has been slow to develop and to be recognized as a central rather than a marginal concern of sociologists, despite the emergence of a more 'radical' or 'critical' perspective in educational analysis. Indeed it is perhaps *because* of the more 'left wing' slant of educational research in this country that gender and race have not been given much attention, in competition as they are with 'social class' – the dominant category. Often only lip service is paid to the existence of a sexual division of labour within British society, and sex as an attribute is mentioned, in passing, as a contributory yet unanalyzed factor of social inequality.

Despite the fact that *gender*, as a concept, is defined specifically as a socially and culturally constructed identity, largely produced through educational experiences in the family and school, the differences between concepts of masculinity and femininity and their relations have had either an 'invisible' or a 'cinderella' status in contemporary British sociology of education. Halsey *et. al.*'s study (1980) for example, represents *par excellence* the traditional concerns of educational analysis – social mobility and class inequality – as well as its traditional methodology. The sample they use is a group of 10 000 men! In this study, it is assumed that one can answer in a meaningful and adequate way the following questions without reference to the female half of the British population: 'How far has the British education system achieved its professed goal of meritocracy? What are the handicaps which prevent *individuals* attaining educational success? What are the likely consequences



of comprehensive reform for the achievement of goals such as equality of opportunity and equality of results? Is the structure of the educational system important?' (p. 13) (my emphasis).

However, by 1980 several major texts on women, as well as a considerable number of sociological studies of the family, women's work, culture, etc., had been published. These included a number of works which specifically addressed the nature of women's and girls' schooling. They surveyed the range of research material already available yet not generally referred to, and presented new theories, data and suggestions for a sociology of gender education. Most notable were Byrne (1978), David (1980), Deem (1978), Deem (Ed.) (1980), Delamont (1980), Chetwynd and Hartnett (1978), Sharpe (1976), Delamont and Duffin (Eds.) (1978), and Wolpe (1977). Here, I shall give a brief overview of the material represented by these texts, distinguishing between the two major (although not the only) perspectives of this research. In setting up the distinction between the *cultural* perspective and the *political economy* perspective and placing works within one or the other, I am aware of the crudity of this distinction, the difficulty of placing certain individual's work especially since they move across the divide as they develop their theory, and the limitations involved in an analysis which 'homogenizes' a variety of positions into one of two 'camps'. However I offer this distinction in order to make some sense (even if simplistic) of the movement and the tensions in this current of research. I have no wish to imply that one perspective is 'better' than the other, since I believe that both have advantages and limitations which would encourage their development and modification. Both perspectives paradoxically extend and limit directions of research by their choice of problem, their methods of analysis, and their political orientation.

I would, however, at this stage point out that I have placed my own publications within the political economy perspective – a fact which must to a certain extent reveal where I think the starting point for a sociology of gender education should begin, even if the finishing line is not within that perspective as currently defined. The reason for my position is because most of the research I would wish to place within the cultural perspective has treated in an unproblematic way the location of school in its socio-historical context. The definition of the 'problem' of gender education here is one which views the inequalities of the sexes as an 'educational problem' with an 'educational solution'. In this sense I believe it has taken-for-granted the political construction of the problem as set up by policymakers, who in their turn are informed and advised by such research. In contrast, the political economy perspective moves outside the official ideology of education, which tends to view the school as a neutral, autonomous agent of social change. It relocates the issue of gender differentiation in education into its social and material conditions of existence and seeks solutions in a whole range of social institutions, social contexts and agencies, of which education is only one. The advantages of this latter perspective are that it can view critically the development of state educational policy in the area of class and gender; that it can relate the structuring of the school and its products to the structuring of the labour process and domestic life; and can identify the forces and structures outside the school which could militate against any internal 'radical' reform.



On the other hand, this political economy perspective has disadvantages in that it has not adequately described the *processes* whereby gender identities and relations are produced, reproduced and challenged within the day-to-day life of the schools. While the political economy perspective on the one hand seeks the origins of sexual divisions of labour and the reasons *why* they took the form they did historically, the cultural perspective attempts to describe and explain *how* gender differences are created and maintained through schooling. This difference in focus and investigation can best be described as that of *internal* versus *external* accounts, which take as their rationale the political goals of the researchers. On the whole, those who investigate school processes tend to support a political vision of equality of opportunity and equality of treatment between boys and girls which would allow for the individual development of talent, irrespective of sex. While these goals are supported by those involved in developing a political economy perspective, they do not constitute a sufficient target since the premise of this other research is that sexual inequalities have material bases which would need to be challenged both at the level of patriarchy and of capitalism.

### The Cultural Perspective

The cultural perspective takes as its starting point the problem of the social inequalities of girls, who, it is generally recognized, are handicapped rather than 'advantaged' by their educational experiences in comparison with boys. The differences found between boys and girls in educational routes, curricula choices, examination results, success in entry into further and higher education, etc. are now common knowledge, yet it is only relatively recently that they have become a matter of political and social concern (and a limited concern at that). As Wolpe (1976) has shown, the official ideology of educational reports such as the Norwood and Crowther Reports took it for granted that the education of girls and boys should differ especially since, 'evidently', they had different 'special interests and aptitudes'. Boys, it was argued, not only wanted to, but should become supporters of future families and girls should and would become future wives and mothers. In the Norwood Report, Wolpe argues:

Girls were seen to comprise a homogenous group on the basis of their gender. In other words, although pupils in general were considered in a hierarchical structure in regard to their future positions in stratification terms, female pupils were not even considered as people who have a position in any hierarchy except on the basis of what they might attain through their husband's position in society.

(Wolpe 1976, p. 145)

However, as a result of the combination, on the one hand, of new 'man-power' needs for more highly-skilled technologists and a more productive workforce, and on the other hand, the public espousal of an ideology of



equality of opportunity, there was a slightly greater recognition of the importance of women's waged work in the economy.

It was this social democratic ideology and the new economic 'requirements' which provided the context, rather than the resources, for a reform initiative to bring more women and girls into 'non-traditional' jobs, skill-training and scientific education, as Deem (1980) has documented. However this concern for girls' education and their 'wasted talents' was essentially conservative in its approach to the problem. Girls' schooling and their work patterns were seen as a function of their interests and choice rather than as resulting from any structural pattern in the development of female education or from the use made of female labour in the economy in the least skilled, lowest paid, generally part-time and dead end jobs. The solution to the problem of how to encourage girls to take up new areas of work and training involved the widening of girls' 'interests' in the work sphere while maintaining their 'consensual interest in marriage'. This 'attitudinal' approach to educational and social reform characterizes most of the recent policy documents which deal with gender differences and penetrates much of the thinking behind the Sex Discrimination Act and its agency the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Take for example the DES survey on *Curricula Differences for Boys and Girls* (1975) which revealed a variety of discriminatory practices in English and Welsh schools. These practices were considered by the researchers to be unacceptable in the light of a policy of equality of opportunity, particularly when it was shown that in the area of science and technical education, women were severely under-represented and often under-privileged in access to such curricula. Inequalities in curricula provision, in the range of subjects offered and studied by boys and girls, were found in primary, middle and secondary schools as well as further education. Single sex schools were markedly less discriminatory in so far as science curricula were concerned. However, what the report showed overall was a general and deep trend of gender segregation and inequality in the educational system. The source of this pattern they judged to be convention and custom which has meant that 'across all sections of society, it has been normal to regard the boy as the bread winner and the girl as the future mother, deputizing for the mother when circumstances so demand' (p. 23). These 'traditional' assumptions were being worked through the curriculum patterns by the majority of teachers, parents and pupils.

What the DES Survey reproduced was a new official definition or what Bourdieu called a 'misrecognition' of the problem. What had been an explicit policy of the state (that of *sex segregation* of boys and girls through differential curriculum provision) both historically (Sharpe 1976, Delamont 1978a and b, Purvis 1980) and according to Deem (1980) in the present day (although it is now implicit) had by the 1970s become redefined as an 'educational problem'. This problem was not presented as one which was created through the development of mass schooling for particular purposes (which we shall come on to later) but as the result of traditional or misguided attitudes and assumptions of parents, teachers and employers. In 1975, the same year the Sex Discrimination Act was passed, *ILEA's Standing Committee Report on Career Opportunities for Women and Girls* was



published which explicitly reinforced this view:

Entrenched attitudes of parents, teachers, employers, or girls and women themselves and society in general may be held responsible for the many and diverse factors leading to the present unsatisfactory career prospects for women and girls.

*These widely held attitudes as to what is and what is not 'women's work' result in many myths and taboos which are undoubtedly the root cause of discrimination against women in employment, of the lack of educational expectation and opportunity in schools and further education, and of that apparently missing intangible factor 'ambition' in girls in general . . . (my emphasis).* (p. 13)

The political reconstruction of the problem of girls' educational 'underachievement' involved therefore the 'misrecognition' of the causes of gender differentiation. It affected not just the forms of state provision for the alleviation of such sex discrimination but also, I believe, some sociological research which has received uncritically the official view of the origins of female inequality. However, before we move on to a discussion of this research, let us briefly look at the ideology of the Equal Opportunities Commission which, in its educational guidelines, makes explicit reference to some of this sociological material. In 1975 the EOC was set up to help implement the Sex Discrimination Act since it was recognized that legislation was not sufficient to achieve its political goal – that of equality of opportunity. In attempting to raise the consciousness of all those involved in the educational system to the problem of sex discrimination, the EOC recently published a pamphlet *Do you Provide Equal Educational Opportunities?* listing a variety of types of unlawful practice. These included the use of separate tests; different sex norms in the calculation of tests; separate listings of scores; quota systems based on sex; exclusion from courses of study, facilities and benefits, out-of-school activities, work experience courses, etc. on the grounds of sex; sex discrimination in career guidance, in the appointment and promotion of staff, etc. The 'causes' of such unlawful practice are found, according to the EOC, in the majority of cases in the 'unintentional' behaviour of teachers who hold traditional attitudes and assumptions as to the 'natural' differences and interests of boys and girls. Discrimination in education and training therefore is most likely to occur by *default* rather than intent. The solution to such educational discrimination is to be found in the development of more progressive attitudes which are more open to objective rather than sex-based and hence 'biased' assessments of individual children and adults, and the promotion of 'good practice'. These would

encourage positively the learning of non-traditional skills by removing any existing barriers and by initiating new courses and developing new teaching material where appropriate. (p. 2)



This pamphlet, as one can see by looking at the 'guide to background reading' is informed by much of the current research on gender and gender education, a large proportion of which could be described as sociological. This research as well as the report are characterized by a concern, on the one hand, for the *internal* structures and processes of schooling, whether they are the curriculum, the hidden curriculum, the form of pedagogy and evaluation or the statistics of educational performance, recruitment into various educational institutions and examination attempts and successes. On the other hand there is a concern for the attitudes of all those involved in the education of girls and boys and those who are most directly concerned with the nature of the educational product – employers, training officers, personnel divisions. The attitudes of pupils and students are also seen as critical aspects of the problem of educational opportunities, particularly when they affect the choice of educational routes, the 'seizing' of openings and the use of facilities. Since the assumption of the ideology of equality of opportunity is that the individual has the right to choose freely which career, which education and lifestyle he or she wishes, it is essential that ignorance of work opportunities is reduced (through the development of careers guidance and work visits, etc) and the appropriate motivation to succeed is encouraged in all pupils.

The model of the school which pervades the majority of the research in this tradition is that of 'sex-role socialization' where the internal structures and processes of schooling are seen to form the basis of a particular 'preparation' for social life. What the school is seen as transmitting is a set of behavioural norms and a set of beliefs which distinguish between the male and the female. These social values are internalized by pupils, who develop the appropriate dispositions, behaviour patterns and identities so that little girls become feminine and little boys become masculine. The school reinforces and is reinforced by the work of the family which teaches the child the differences between masculinity and femininity from the moment it is born (Belotti 1975). In these analyses it is assumed that all girls experience similar problems within the family (which is seen as a universal social institution), within the educational system and outside the school, since the definitions of gender are taken to be societal rather than class specific. In this sense, gender is regarded from an anthropological viewpoint – one which has stressed the variable nature of gender *across* different cultures (Oakley, 1972; Mead 1949) but not the internal variability of its social construction *within* one society. The assumption of the Norwood Report, referred to earlier, that all girls constitute a homogenous group with common 'special interests' is revised so that all girls are judged to experience common 'special problems' in school. The source of these problems is found in, what has been termed by some, the *sex-role ideology* (e.g. Gaskell 1977/8). This ideology or belief presupposes 'natural' differences between boys and girls; it locates women in the home and men in the economy; it encourages employers, careers officers, teachers, parents and pupils to expect different futures, different work patterns and different life styles and interests for boys and girls. The source of this ideology is not identified except, paradoxically, in so far as it is also the *result* of the educational process. Children, leaving the school with such a belief system, become the next generation of parents, teachers and employers. Thus the sex-role



ideology is seen as both the cause *and* the effect of gender differentiation in education.

These assumptions can be found most clearly in the research on sex-role socialization which utilized what Eichler called 'cultural theory'. Eichler (1979) argues that:

Cultural theory purports . . . that a consistently different treatment of the sexes has resulted in different behaviour patterns which are maintained through a differential opportunity structure and through differential rewards for identical behaviours for boys and girls or women and men (that is, through sex-role socialization). Thus female and male people are made to conform to preconceived notions of femininity and masculinity. (p. 338)

The analysis of sex-role socialization is one which, in general, because of the statistics of educational 'underachievement' argues for the *success* of this process. Girls are assumed to adopt successfully the societal definition of femininity which, according to Loftus (1974), in our society involves the internalization of the characteristics of 'docility, submission, altruism, tenderness, striving to be attractive, not being forceful or bold or physically strong, active or sexually potent' (p. 7). Similar statements of the nature of femininity can be found in other studies of gender socialization and sex roles – for example Belotti's analysis (1975) of childcare and primary education, Lobban's study (1975a) of primary schools and Frazier and Sadker's analysis (1973) of the school system in the United States. The variables these studies identify in this research, as part of the socializing work of the schools, include the physical and educational segregation of boys and girls, curricula differences, differences in tasks, activities and projects given to children of different sexes, the sex inequalities of the teaching profession where women predominate in primary schools, in the lower scales of the teaching profession and are under-represented at the top decision-making levels (see Delamont, 1980 for coverage of the British research). Studies of children's literature such as those by Lobban (1975b) and Weitzman *et. al.* (1972) identify the 'invisibility' of girls and women or their representation in stereotypes which confirm their inferiority and thus contribute to the process of gender socialization.

The considerable range of variables in the study of school socialization can be seen most clearly in the contributions of Alison Kelly's edited collection (1981) which analyze from several different perspectives the problem of why girls do not study scientific subjects and why they do not succeed in finding careers in the scientific and technical professions. Here the research ranges from a discussion of the significance of the type of science (physics, biology, chemistry) to the image of science and the scientist ('humanitarian' or 'socially oppressive'), the sex of the science teacher, the type of teaching (demonstrations or practicals), the type of assessment (multiple choice versus essays), the type of essay and examination question (are they concerned with male or female interests?) and the type of career prospects (suitable for



family life?). Certainly this research is invaluable in that it forces one to recognize the complexity of gender socialization and it points to the necessity of identifying not just overt but also *covert* form of discrimination within educational institutions. Second, besides indicating the significance of both the form of knowledge transmitted and the form of its transmission and evaluation, this research also gives us an indication of the impact of gender expectations of teachers; the effect they have in terms of the self images and academic aspirations of their pupils. In this sense the research puts forward a view of the school as an institution in which a self-fulfilling prophecy is created and maintained through the use of gender labelling and differentiation.

At the level of employers' discriminatory attitudes, there is now the research, for example, of Keil and Newton (1980) who showed that employers' definition of 'suitability' for work 'often meant a series of ascriptive characteristics relating to appearance and/or attitudes' (p. 101) which were often linked to skill level and implicitly rather than explicitly to the sex of the recruit. Conventional attitudes of employers to male and female recruits revealed in Ashton and Maguire's (1980) study of three local labour markets showed that employers pre-classified jobs into male and female work and recruited accordingly. Here women were seen as 'naturally' more able than men to cope with detailed, boring and repetitive assembly work; they were better, or were assumed to be better at jobs demanding dexterity, and requiring neat work at high speed.

These stereotypes of the conforming, primarily sedentary and passive female worker can also be found in the school setting, particularly in teachers' attitudes to their female pupils. Classroom studies of teachers' attitudes towards, and expectations of, girls as well as the form of interaction between female pupils and teachers of both sexes, generally come to similar conclusions – that teachers tend to discriminate in the amount and quality of the attention they pay to male and female pupils. For examples of this research see Jackson and Lahaderne (1967), Sears and Feldman (1966), Evans (1979) and Delamont (1980). In her summary of the American literature, Levy (1972) shows that teachers tend to give boys far more disapproval, blame and prohibitory messages than girls – which, on the one hand, could be seen as unfair to the boys. However, one could equally well argue, as some have, that girls receive as a result less attention from the teacher, less interaction and less encouragement to participate in the classroom activities. Girls also receive more approval for conformity and sex-typed behaviour rather than approval for academic work. In 1978, Lobban (1978) also surveyed this research and argued that the evidence showed that:

Teachers of both sexes thus appear to endorse sex-role stereotypes. They believe that extreme differences between males and females exist as early as age three. They also appear to believe that it is appropriate to behave differently to the sexes in accord with their 'natural' characteristics. They seem to interpret behaviour according to stereotypes, they expect their female pupils to be passive, dependent, compliant and



on the way to marriage as their only life-consuming career, while the males are expected to be active, independent, bright and challenging and destined for a 'real' career. (p. 57)

The attitudinal approach to the problem of sex discrimination is also reinforced by the research, again mainly conducted in the United States, which shows the patterns of girls' lack of achievement motivation. Horner (1971), following a Freudian analysis, puts girls' underachievement down to their psychological 'fear' or 'avoidance' of success. Gaskell argues (1977/8) that sex-role ideology affects their future ambitions which then in turn limits their educational aspirations.

What the equality of opportunity model and its cultural perspective offers are considerable insights into the nature and extent of the unequal treatment of girls in comparison to boys in the educational system. Yet there are also several limitations in these analyses; first, they cannot explain why gender has taken the form it has historically, why it has penetrated both the private and state school system to such an extent. Second, they cannot explain, partly because they have not recognized it as a problem, the diversity of experience between girls of different social classes or different racial groups. While it is easy to argue that girls are under-represented in higher education, working class or black girls are even more under-represented than white middle-class girls. Third, what the analyses assume rather than investigate is the generality of *one* social construction of gender and gender difference and the *successful* and unconflictual acquisition by each new generation of that definition of masculinity and femininity. Further, a related unexamined assumption is that the family and the school transmit the *same* definition of gender and that no conflict occurs between these two social institutions. Yet is this view tenable when one remembers class cultures and their impact on family life and the domestic divisions of labour? (Oakley 1977; Hall 1980).

However, the development of sex role socialization theory has, in a feminist context, provided useful material and evidence for the impact of patriarchal forms of control in schooling. For those feminists who wish to identify the existence of male dominance and female subordination and its reproduction through the transmission of 'male culture' and male-constructed definitions of femininity, this research has much to say. The common experience of girls portrayed and analyzed in these studies provides evidence for the collective nature of women's oppression not just within education but outside. Further, the form of training offered in the school can be seen, not as a neutral, social process but one suited to 'male interests'. Loftus (1974) for example argues that the definition of 'femininity' discussed above is ideal to qualify women 'for a lifetime of servicing, maintaining and comforting men'. Elinor Kelly (1981) argues that an education which does not encourage and which even discourages girls from taking science, is one which keeps the privilege of the occupations in the scientific professions and the considerable socio-economic and political power, inherent in science and technology, exclusively for men.

Wolpe (1977) and Jackson (1978) also point to the implications of an education system which socializes the female child not just into a gender



identity but also a sexual identity which is focused on romance, childbearing and attractiveness to men. Feminine sexuality is learned through socio-sexual scripts which pull together past random sexual experiences into a new adult identity. The acquisition of this definition of feminine sexuality has the effect of concentrating girls' ambitions on their future roles as wives and mothers; it also simultaneously reduces their interest and aspirations in academic attainments, training and careers. The period of adolescence for Wolpe and Jackson is one in which the 'prophecy' is fulfilled – where the girls' educational aspirations are reduced, their performance at school lowered and their future subordination in work and in the family reproduced. The school prepares them therefore for a life of financial and emotional dependency on men.

The role of the school portrayed in this research is shown to be paradoxical as Horner (1971) explains:

A peculiar paradox arises in the society because we have an educational system that ostensibly encourages and prepares men and women identically for careers that social and, even more importantly, internal psychological pressures really limit to men. (p. 97)

Within this context, one can now find studies of the responses of girls to such an ideology of the school which contains the contradictions between an ideology of equality of opportunity and the ideology of femininity which locates women in the home, and stresses their 'inferiority' as a 'caste'.

Studies such as Llewellyn (1980), Davies (1978), Fuller (1980) and McRobbie (1978) reveal the different patterns of response and resistance of girls, compared with those of boys, to the school. I find it particularly interesting in the work of Fuller and McRobbie to see how the forms of response to schooling is mediated by the girls' racial and class origins. What this new research does is to develop, within the cultural perspective, the analysis of the *culture* of the girls rather than just describing their attitudes and aspirations. In this sense, it challenges the individualism which has characterized this perspective to date. The identification of the collective construction of girls' own 'feminine' culture and what McRobbie called their 'cult of femininity', as well as the processes of negotiation of gender in the school and the classrooms, opens up new avenues of research. The advantage of this material is that it moves away from the passive view of girls as indifferent recipients of schooling and classroom control towards a more active and hence more 'unstereotypical' view of the female sex. The forms of gender struggle *within* the school will be one of the most fruitful areas of investigation, I believe, since it will also raise the question whether there are different or contradictory definitions of masculinity and femininity available.

The social construction of gender cannot, in my view, be assumed to have occurred totally behind the educational scene (as the political economy perspective tends to argue), since what we are observing in the research discussed so far is a very complex process of reproduction, production and transformation of gender categories. Having said that, I do not believe that



one can separate out the two categories of male and female, as much of this research on schools does. Rather we need to recognize, Chodorow (1979) argues, that the structure of gender relations is what is critical. *Gender difference* can be 'constructed' in a variety of ways as Clarricoates (1980) discovered in her study of four British primary schools. Each school had a different social environment – there was a traditional working-class school, a modern suburban 'rural' middle-class school, a council estate school and a small rural primary school. What Clarricoates found was that "femininity" varies and does so according to the area in which the school is situated . . . that despite such variation, the subordination of women is always maintained' (p. 40).

The dominant *gender code*, as I have described it elsewhere (1980), or dominant set of gender relations in all of the four schools studied by Clarricoates consisted of three aspects:

- (1) The sexes were separated which, whether intended or not, inculcated rivalry and antagonism between the sexes.
- (2) The forms of punishment differed for boys and girls which militated against solidarity developing across the gender divide.
- (3) The teachers tended to enumerate the same differences between boys and girls. Boys were assumed to be livelier, adventurous, aggressive, boisterous, self-confident, independent, energetic, loyal and couldn't-care-less while girls were obedient, tidy, neat, conscientious, orderly, fussy, catty, bitchy and gossipy.

Clarricoates concludes therefore that:

All women, whatever their 'class' (economic class for women is always in relation to men – fathers and husbands) suffer oppression. It is patriarchy in the male hierarchical ordering of society, preserved through marriage and the family via the sexual division of labour that is at the core of women's oppression; and it is schools, through their different symbolic separation of the sexes, that gives this oppression the seal of approval. (p. 40)

Sex-role socialization and cultural theory generally, therefore, despite its limitations, does have advantages particularly in the recognition of the common experience of women and girls in the educational system. What it does not do, however, is go beyond the strictly educational analysis. Hence it limits its own explanatory power and ultimately its political potency since it has not traced the roots of gender differentiation, it merely assumes them.

### The Political Economy Perspective

The tendency of most of the research so far discussed has been to stress the importance of gender differentiation often to the neglect of any other



dimension of social inequality. This is particularly true of the more recent studies of the 'hidden curriculum' of schooling in contrast to the older statistical research on curricular choice, examination performance, resource allocation and pupils' attitudes to school and work. In the more quantitative research, gender differences were often noticed and studied in the context of class inequalities and patterns of class achievement.

Two relatively recent examples of this work in the equality of opportunity framework are King (1971) and Byrne (1975, 1978). King shows statistically that, while what he calls the 'class gap' in education has lessened in the last forty years (although not that greatly at the university level), this has not removed inequality of opportunity in education since there is also a 'sex gap' which differs for each social class. He found that:

At each level of education the sex gap is bigger for the working class than for the middle class and the class gap is bigger for girls than for boys. As the level of education rises the sex gap widens for both classes, but widens more for the working class. The class gap also widens for both sexes, but more for girls than for boys. (p. 171)

Yet as Wolpe (1978b) points out, King 'ultimately' explains the situation of women through their orientations which are themselves derived from their positions in the occupational/class structure. The assumption is that the educational system offers equal opportunities alike to all boys and all girls' (p. 299). The problem is then that children do not seize these opportunities with equal enthusiasm and commitment to progress up the educational and social scale.

This assumption is challenged by Byrne (1978) who, because of her interest in the patterns of resource allocation to various educational sectors and curricula, is able to recognize the inherent *structural* inequalities and patterns of gender division within school. Girls, she argues, suffer the cumulative effects of 'triple' discrimination, if they are working class and from rural backgrounds. She writes:

Hidden, indeed, also are the inequalities not only between the sexes, but within each sex; between girls of different regions, different classes and different backgrounds. Crossing like a matrix are cumulative dimensions of priority for the academically able, priority of esteem for the older . . . against the younger . . . priority of esteem and investment for the traditional and academically respectable (universities, sixth forms, advanced higher education) over the highly efficient and industrially relevant but politically non-U and (for educational planners) 'nouveaux-riches' colleges of technology and further education. (p. 110)

Byrne's concern for state educational policy and priorities is one which she shares with those I see as utilizing a political economy perspective, since she



moves beyond an 'attitudinal' approach to a more structural version of discrimination. Indeed, the humanism of her approach with its emphasis on human rights and equality of treatment of all children according to their talents leads Byrne to similar political and educational solutions to those of the more 'radical' critics of education. Yet that is where the similarity ends since Byrne still remains largely within the framework of the educational planners discussed in the above section. Byrne does not explain the origins of what, in her book, she outlines so clearly – the patterns of sex discrimination and bias in education.

A recognition of the effect of social class is not therefore a sufficient criteria, even though it is an essential ingredient, of a political economy perspective. This latter perspective, which is only now beginning to make some headway in British sociology of education, is closely tied to the Marxist analyses of schooling developed by such people as Bowles and Gintis (1976), Althusser (1971), and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977). Here the attempt is to locate schooling in a wider social context than that of educational administration, to relate patterns of gender education to the structuring of the labour process and the family under the conditions of a capitalist mode of production. The *sexual division of labour* is the central concept in this analysis which recognizes the historical specificity of forms of gender division, inside and outside the school. Secondly, the integration of this division of labour which existed prior to capitalism, but which nevertheless became part of it, into the structure of class relations, provides the material context and preconditions for the development of a 'sex-role ideology'. Ideologies of gender, of femininity and sexuality are brought into contact, in these theories, with the ideologies of class differences and class control.

This research and theoretical analysis revolve around the problems of accounting for the form of gender division, the form of its reproduction in culture and education, and the impact of this process of reproduction on men's and women's lives, who are already contained within class categories. There is also a concern to describe and explain the interventions of the state in gender education by 'exposing' the gender ideologies within state policy and by providing a critique of state practice. In this sense, the political economy approach is one which does not take for granted the official rhetoric of policymakers, even though it may support the educational reforms proposed, in the short term.

Two areas of research are beginning to raise interesting questions concerning the pattern of educational provision – the first is the analysis of the historical and contemporary nature of state ideology and provision of women's education, and the second is the analysis of the relationship between female education and the 'dual' location of women in the family and the waged labour process. Sex discrimination between boys and girls in the provision of resources and curricula have been documented by a variety of authors (Byrne 1978; Wolpe 1976, 1978a; Deem 1978; David 1980). The assumption of what Wolpe called the 'common code' of state policymakers has been that of a purposeful gender segregation on the basis, in the nineteenth century, of there being different 'stations in life' for men and women. This led to an emphasis on the domestic futures of girls and the occupational futures of boys



(Dyehouse 1977; Sharpe 1976; Purvis 1980, 1981). By the twentieth century, this ideology had been converted from the notion of the 'natural' division of the sexes and their roles in life to the concept of special interests and special needs. At no point can one find an ideology of equality between the sexes as either the organizing principle of educational provision or educational reform. Even in 1977, the Consultative Document: *Education in Schools* argued in contradictory fashion:

Equal opportunity does not necessarily mean identical classroom provision for boys and girls but it is essential, that in translating their aims into day to day practice, schools should not by their assumptions, decisions or choice of teaching materials, limit the educational opportunities offered to girls.

(DES 1977 para 10.9, quoted in Byrne 1978, p. 255)

Yet state educational policies which have explicitly or implicitly promoted different and unequal educations for boys and girls, (David 1980) cannot be divorced from those policies simultaneously promoting class segregation and class differentiated curricula; described, for example, by Johnson (1970).

The relationship between this gender history of educational provision and *other* state policies (such as class education, welfare provision, employment policy, etc.) is one which is now recognized as critical for the account of current ideologies and patterns of schooling. Deem (1980) in a recent paper argues that the 'treatment of women in education has been closely linked to other social policies and to prevalent ideologies about women's roles'. The intervention of the state in educating women is one which, according to Davin (1979), requires special explanation since the benefits which would accrue to the state and the economy in educating men in the nineteenth century would not arise in the case of women since they were neither voters nor skilled workers. Increasingly what is evident is that any explanation of state policy in the area of women's education must look at the location of women in society (their economic, political and cultural position) before one can understand the reason for, and the nature of, state intervention, and the specific patterns of educational provision. This would involve looking at women's 'dual' location – in the home, as wives, mothers and 'domestic labourers', and in the waged labour process as a cheap source of unskilled, often part-time workers. In this context one can begin to look, in different historical periods, at the specific form of state intervention, mediating through education, the balance of women's waged and unwaged work. This process can then be related to the development of the economy, the transformation of the labour force and process and the changing nature of domestic life and its division of labour.

Second, this research recognizes that one must look at the relationship between forms of class and gender education, to see if they were and are compatible in their shape and aims; if they exist as two independent parallel lines within schooling or whether they are patterns of control which could be in conflict with each other. As Delamont (1978a) writes:



The central issue in the history of education and careers for women is the relation between sex and class. Throughout the nineteenth century the debate about the proper education and life-work for women was conducted along class lines; class lines which still delineate many of the ideas about women's education to this day. (p. 134)

The history of state policy and provision of female education is one which is not uncontroversial. Whilst Dyehouse (1977) and Delamont (1978a) argue that working-class education was undifferentiated in the nineteenth century, and only became gender-divided by the turn of the century, Sharpe (1976) and Purvis (1981) on the other hand have pointed to the pre-existing differences of working-class boys' and girls' education in the elementary school tradition and their continuance in state-provided education, as it was established. What these studies have in common, however, is a concern to relate the patterns of gender education not just to the children's class origins but also to their class *futures* (defined as both domestic and waged workers).

This leads me on to the second area of research and discussion in the political economy perspective – that of the social and cultural reproduction of the sexual division of labour under capitalism. The relationship between the school and the family, and the school and the waged labour process, are critical aspects of this sociological research. In terms of the family, the concept of 'domestic ideology' has become widely used, e.g. by Hall (1980), Purvis (1980, 1981), Delamont and Duffin (1978), and Deem (1980), to describe the ways in which women's familial roles are reproduced through schooling. Here for example, the curricula provision of 'domestic' subjects, the ideology of educationalist which stresses girls' domestic futures as primary, girls' expectations of work and marriage, are all taken as significant aspects of this process. Further, David (1978, 1980), has argued for a recognition of the 'family-education' couple and an analysis of the intervention of the state in taking over parental control over, and responsibility towards, their children's education.

The relationship between the family and the school is however a complex one to unravel and cannot be treated as unproblematic as, I have argued, those using the cultural perspective have. Nor can one assume a necessary continuity in the process of the formation of gender identities or a similarity between the 'work' of the family and the 'work' of the school. The existence of class cultures together with their specific definitions of gender in the family, and the transmission of a specifically bourgeois culture in the school, suggests that conflict rather than continuity characterize the transition of the child from one social environment to the other (see MacDonald 1981a and b for a discussion of this point). Certainly the work of Willis (1977) and McRobbie (1978) supports this view, in their portrayal of working-class constructions of masculinity and femininity and the use made of these cultural forms in resisting the school. Davin's (1979) work also supports the idea that the message of the school is one of transmitting bourgeois values – and in particular the bourgeois ideal of the family form with wage-earning husband, dependent housekeeping wife and dependent children. I have argued



elsewhere (1981a) that school culture, the message of the hidden and overt curriculum, the message of the texts, may all be seen as part of the attempt of the bourgeoisie to win the consent of children to white, male bourgeois dominance. Hence gender education is part of the hegemony of that social class, as well as being part of male hegemony.

The context of class domination provides certainly the setting in which specific forms of gender relations and differences are taught through the 'gender code' of schooling. Using Bourdieu's theory, I argued (1979/80) that the child is encouraged in the school to acquire 'symbolic mastery' of bourgeois cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity, taught in abstract and academic form. For example, the equation of masculinity and pure high status science, referred to earlier, can be seen as a form of class and gender control, which has advantages for the male middle classes. Saraga and Griffiths (1981) support this view, to a certain extent, by arguing that the dominance of men in science cannot be explained without reference to capitalism and class relations of control.

The analyses of the relationship between gender education and the labour process again concentrate on the relationship between class and gender. Here the analyses have tended to be dominated by an Althusserian notion of social reproduction of the labour force, the social relations of production and more recently the biological reproduction of the labour force. The use of reproduction theory characterizes the ongoing work of Wolpe, Deem, David, MacDonald and Barrett, who refer to this theory as their point of departure for a discussion of gender education. All however have modified the theory in order to apply it to this new context, the aim being to explain the processes of reproduction of the sexual divisions of labour in the waged and domestic labour forces, the patterns of sex segregation in types of work and the division between the public/male world of the economy and the private/female sphere of domestic life. The task is a difficult one since, as Barrett points out, the theories of class and class reproduction are not immediately transferable to a study of gender, especially since they have ignored, I have argued, the existence of forms of patriarchal control in the social relations of production, the relationship between the family and the educational system as both origin and destination of each new generation, and the patterns of sex-segregation in the labour force and the labour markets (MacDonald 1980, 1981b). Wolpe (1978b) has argued that the educational system has a 'relative autonomy' from the labour process, mediating often in contradictory fashion the requirements of a continually-transformed labour process and labour force. The two roles of women in the family and waged work are essentially contradictory and this contradiction is encouraged rather than discouraged by schooling. One cannot therefore talk of the reproduction of one sphere without reference to the reproduction of the other. Deem (1980) also takes this view in her analysis of social democratic educational policy and the implications for women's education of the crisis in capital accumulation, the present attack on the welfare state under Toryism and the resurgence of an ideology of the family which stresses women's domestic nature and role.

Most of this research is to a certain extent committed to providing an account of the relationship between gender and class and the interrelations of



structures of class and gender relations. This in itself is a difficult task since one is trying, at one and the same time, to account for the unity of pattern in girls' schooling and also the *diversity* of their experiences, determined as they are by the class origins of the students and the type of educational provision which is class-determined. What tends to get lost in this attempt at integration are firstly the analysis of *conflict* between class and gender as two structures of control, and secondly the analysis of *patriarchy* as a structure of domination in its own right which can exist within, yet also separate from, the structures of capitalism.

Let me take the analysis of conflict first. This neglect is partly a result of the concern to synthesize and make relevant gender analysis to class theories of education and *vice versa*. However, the limitations of doing this are in the development of a theoretical debate which does not describe the lived experience of pupils and teachers in the school. There is no sense therefore of the processes in which these two forms of education come together in the everyday life of the school. Thus the political economists have had to rely on the research data of sociologists in the cultural perspective which has not, as we have seen, sought to outline differences in girls' schooling but rather their similarities. The result is a neglect of the areas in which both class and gender controls are challenged. We do not know how gender struggles relate to forms of class struggle in schools, whether the response of the child to the class culture of the school is mediated by their sex, or whether class resistance can be oppressive in itself. I am thinking here of Willis' (1977) research which showed that one of the most crucial aspects of the working-class 'lads' culture which helped them resist the school, was that of inherent sexism and a celebration of masculinity that was oppressive to women. Through such research we can glimpse the complexity of the relations of these two forms of control and the forms of resistance to them. Further, without such research we tend to be presented with an overly determined view of women. Whilst the cultural perspective tended to present women as 'oversocialized', this approach offers an image of women as being 'doubly determined' in an education system which apparently is successful in creating conforming women *and* workers.

Secondly, this political-economy perspective with its Marxist orientation tends to undertheorize and under-represent the impact of specifically patriarchal forms of domination and control. It is unclear in these analyses, despite the reference to the growth of capitalism, *why* gender divisions were advantageous to capital in the control of the workforce. The analysis presumes the prior existence and prevalence of male domination and argues for the 'adaptation' of these forms of control by capital. In this sense we are left with an analysis of the relationship of schooling to the capitalist sexual division of labour but not to the domination of men *as* men, in political, economic and cultural spheres. Gender analysis in this case is being fitted into class analysis rather than encouraging the development of new theory.

What I would like to argue in conclusion is that although this survey is very brief and certainly not comprehensive, it does indicate differences in the perspectives available for the study of gender. This division between 'macro' and 'micro' theories of schooling, despite appearances, is not identical to that



found in mainstream sociology of education. Unlike the political division between Marxist accounts of education and classroom ethnographies now found in the sociology of education, here one major concern unites *both* groups of researchers – that of accounting for gender inequalities in schooling in order to remove them. In this sense there is a similarity of political intention and both groups, I feel, would support educational reforms such as the provision of identical curricula for boys and girls, the rewriting of school materials to rid them of sexism, the reform of careers guidance to remove its gender biases, etc.. However where those using the sex role socialization model may be more optimistic as to the extent of change brought about by these reforms, those using the political economy perspective would want to show the limitations of such action and the danger of overstressing the possibilities and impact of internal reforms without recognition of external structures, and attempts to change them. The way forward is, I believe, to try and develop a synthesis of these research strands so that the data is in some sense cumulative. There are also many new areas which need research. Further there is a need for other sociologists of education, currently outside this field, to recognize the importance of this work and to shape their studies in such a way as to include as integral and not marginal, the identification of gender patterns in schooling. Perhaps then we may give up the charge that women are the ‘cinderellas’ of sociology of education, entering the scene unrecognized, and quickly leaving it when the real activities begin.

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## **PART 2: CONSTRUCTING A FEMINIST THEORY OF GENDER**



## 5. MALE HEGEMONY, SOCIAL CLASS AND WOMEN'S EDUCATION

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*The ways in which male hegemony in education has and has not been addressed in educational research concerning women and girls in schools are considered. Two bodies of research in the British sociology of education—the cultural tradition and the political economy tradition—are discussed in terms of the ways in which they address the question of gender. The radical theories of social and cultural reproduction of class structure are then considered. It is argued that it is necessary to include a consideration of gender reproduction in any theory of class reproduction, whether the perspective is from a social or a cultural model. A theory of the production of gender differences inside and outside the schools is contrasted with prevailing reproduction theories. The paper concludes with a call for further research in the field of women's education that will both recognize the existence of class and male hegemony in the schools and will at the same time acknowledge that the constant need to reimpose hegemony entails both struggle and the possibility for change.*

At any given time, the more powerful side will create an ideology suitable to help maintain its position and to make this position acceptable to the weaker one. In this ideology the differentness of the weaker one will be interpreted as inferiority, and it will be proven that these differences are unchangeable, basic, or God's will. It is the function of such an ideology to deny or conceal the existence of a struggle. (Horney, 1967, p. 56)

According to Sheila Rowbotham (1973) in *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, the concept of male hegemony, like that of female oppression, is not new, but then as she also points out, it is one thing to encounter a concept, quite another to understand it. That process of understanding requires one to perceive the concept of male hegemony as a whole series of separate "moments" through which women have come to accept a male-dominated culture, its legality, and their subordination to it and in it. Women have become colonized within a male-defined world, through a wide variety of "educational moments" which seen separately may appear inconsequential, but which together comprise a pattern of female experience that is qualitatively different from that of men. These educational moments when collated can provide considerable insights into the collective "lived experience" of women as women. For example, in the educational autobiographies of women edited by Dale Spender and Elizabeth Sarah (1980), what emerges is that

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\*Previously known as MacDonald.



in education women have "learnt to lose" and more than that they have learnt *how* to lose, even though they may have had the ability to succeed academically. Through such experience they have learnt to accept that "the *masculine* man is one who achieves, who is masterful: the *feminine* woman is one who underachieves, who defers" (Brewster, 1980, p. 11).

However, research into the experience of women in education also raises numerous problems, not just in terms of doing the research (e.g., Llewellyn 1980) but also at the level of theorising about education and its relationship to the political and economic context. Here I shall focus upon existing work in British sociology of education to show the differences between two bodies of research into women's education which I call the cultural and political economy perspectives. I will also discuss the relationship between studies of women's education and recent Marxist theories of education. I will examine the interaction between class and male hegemony in education and then attempt to develop a different and very elementary framework within which to conceive of research questions in this area, as a starting point for a more cohesive study of class and gender. The problems raised through attempting to put together theories of two different structures of inequality will at least point to the *complexity* of combining, in everyday life, the demands of two sets of social relations and their interrelations.

In a previous paper (MacDonald, 1980b) I have argued that both class and gender relations constitute hierarchies in which material and symbolic power is based. Inside these hierarchies, the dialectics of class and gender struggles are waged. If we want therefore to research the role of schools as one social "site" in which the reproduction of the socio-sexual division of labour occurs, then it is necessary to be aware of the nature of these two forms of social struggle, the different stakes involved, and how such struggles are "lived through" by individuals who negotiate terms within these power relations and who construct for themselves specific class and gender identities.

The need to describe the processes of gender discrimination in education and its effects—female subordination in the waged and domestic labour forces—is circumscribed by the political commitment to offer suggestions, proposals, and programmes for educational reform which will help liberate women. However, that political cause should not allow us to stop at the immediate level of ethnographic or quantitative description and prescription. We need to go further and analyse in depth the processes of the *production* of gender differences both inside and outside schools, and to analyse the forms of gender reproduction which are inherent in, and not independent of, the patterns of class reproduction, class control, and class struggles.<sup>1</sup> This political and economic context of gender reproduction sets the limits and influences the forms and out-



comes of gender struggles. It critically affects the impact of any education reform and its effectiveness. In this paper, therefore, I shall retain my original position that:

In so far as class relations (in other words the division between capital and labour) constitute the primary element of the capitalist social formation they limit and structure the form of gender relations, the division between male and female properties and identities. I do not believe that one can disassociate the ideological forms of masculinity and femininity, in their historical specificity from either the material basis of patriarchy nor from the class structure. If one definition of femininity or masculinity is dominant, it is the product of patriarchal relations and also the product of class dominance, even though these two structures may exist in contradiction. (MacDonald, 1980b, p. 30.)

The analysis of the origins and nature of gender differences will make reference to the existence of a bourgeois and male hegemony which has controlled the development of female education. The concept of hegemony used here refers to a whole range of structures and activities as well as values, attitudes, beliefs, and morality that in various ways support the established order and the class and male interests which dominate it. By putting the concept of hegemony rather than "reproduction" at the fore of an analysis of class and gender, it is less easy in doing research to forget the *active* nature of the learning process, the existence of dialectic relations, power struggles, and points of conflict, the range of alternative practices which may exist inside, or exist outside and be brought into, the school. Further it allows us to remember that the power of dominant interests is never total nor secure. Cultural hegemony is still a weapon which must be continually struggled for, won, and maintained. Women in this analysis must offer unconsciously or consciously their "consent" to their subordination before male power is secured. They are encouraged "freely" to choose their inferior status and to accept their exploitation as natural. In this sense the production of gender differences becomes a critical point of gender struggle and reproduction, the site of gender control.

### *Cultural and Political Economy Perspectives*

In contrast to studies in the United States, where a considerable amount of research has been carried out on gender socialisation, there is relatively little research on girls' and women's schooling in British sociology of education. It is almost as if the "left wing" stance of much British sociology of education has precluded investigation into the area of gender and race relations within schooling, even though these other structures of inequality are contained within, affect, and even exaggerate



the effects of class divisions as Westergaard and Resler (1975), Byrne (1978), and King (1971) amongst others have discovered. By and large, the analysis of gender divisions has developed separately from that of class divisions and still seems to have had little or almost no impact upon those who remain within that tradition. Even those who appear to have moved away from a strict "correspondence" model such as researchers at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) who now argue that one should recognise that schools face two directions—towards the family and towards the economy—have done little to rectify the class bias of their analysis. In their new publication, *Unpopular Education*, (1981) the analysis of state educational policy and forms of struggle at particular historical conjunctures very quickly leaves the study of parenthood and the relationship between class and gender-determined education on the sidelines. Cultural studies, as Angela McRobbie (1980) has argued, are also guilty of being sex-blind since either they equate "working class culture" only with that of the male working class, or they focus specifically on working class boys and ignore the sexism inherent in their particular form of subcultural "style" or version of masculinity.<sup>2</sup> In terms of classroom ethnography, which is still a major methodological tradition and strand within contemporary British sociology of education, the neglect of gender is even more noticeable and less excusable since it implies that the observer in the classroom is blind to the process of gender discrimination which, according to recent feminist work (e.g., Clarricoates, 1980; Delamont, 1970; Lobban, 1975), occurs most of the time in teacher-pupil interaction, classroom lessons, and pupil control in British primary and secondary schools. Fortunately there is now a growing amount of research, published for example in Deem (1980) and Kelly (1981), which uses a variety of research techniques to investigate the process of gender ascription, labelling, and discrimination in schools.

The development of work on gender in education in Britain, I believe, has employed what I have called the cultural perspective (Arnot, 1981). I have argued that those who use the cultural perspective focus upon the patterns of "sex-role socialization," that is, upon the processes internal to the school which determine and shape the formation of gender identities.<sup>3</sup> Their concern is with educational "underachievement," with the analysis of the overt curriculum and the hidden curriculum, with classroom interaction, with girls' attitudes to schools as well as with teachers' and career officers' attitudes to girls' futures. What this cultural perspective appears to have in common with the political economy model is that it also refers to the processes involved in the "reproduction" of gender. However, "reproduction" here is not a Marxist concept. Several critical differences distinguish the political economy and cultural perspectives—only a few of which I can cover here. Perhaps



the most important difference is that cultural analysis concentrates upon *how* rather than *why* schools function to reproduce the patterns of gender inequality—the focus is therefore upon internal rather than external processes. The origin of these processes lies in the concept of “sex role ideology” (or some equivalent concept), yet, paradoxically, this ideology is also produced and reproduced in the school. It is thus both the *cause* and the *effect* of gender inequality since each new generation of pupils in turn becomes the new generation of parents, teachers, employers, etc., carrying with them the assumptions of such “sex role ideology”. Therefore, what is portrayed is a vicious circle of attitudes in which the learnt attitudes of one generation constrain the new generation and so on. It is in this sense that the concept of “reproduction” is used.

This work challenges traditional sociology of education to recognise the complexity of factors which are to be found in schools and which produce the educational, and later the social, inequality between men and women. These analyses make it difficult to hold any belief that we have achieved formal equality of opportunity within schools by eradicating overt forms of gender discrimination. Further, this challenge is directed towards state educational policy makers who tend to gloss over the nature and extent of discrimination in education against women. The political orientation of much of this research is therefore to challenge the success of the programme for equality of opportunity and to demand that women receive genuine equal opportunity with men. With such a political goal and audience, researchers tend therefore not to address themselves to the radical sociological tradition within sociology of education but rather to aim to influence teachers, local educational authorities, and the Department of Education and Science.

There are two results of such an orientation. First, even though it challenges official views of education, much of this literature takes for granted and uses the official ideology that schools are neutral agents in society and the official definition that if women do “underachieve” relative to men, then it is an “educational problem,” and an “educational solution” must be sought. Second, this literature does not search too deeply into the class basis of the inequality of opportunity which boys suffer. Educational achievement in Britain is still closely correlated with the class origins of students. The implication then appears to be that girls should match the class differentials of educational achievement and access to occupations which boys experience. Equality of opportunity in this context therefore appears to mean similar class-based inequalities of opportunity for both men and women. One could say, equal oppression!

What the cultural perspective lacks is precisely the cutting edge which caused the development of Marxist reproduction theory in the first place—that of a need to provide a critique of educational policy and prac-



tice, to get behind the illusion of education's neutrality and the myth of equality of opportunity, and to explain the relationship of schools to the economy, dominant class interests, and the hierarchical structures of economic and cultural power. Ironically, what the cultural perspective gains by neglecting this analysis of the socioeconomic context of schooling is its optimism, its belief in educational reform and teachers' practice. What it loses is an adequate political analysis of the context in which these reforms would have any impact and the constraints under which schools realistically operate. By failing to provide a critique of liberal ideology and its view of education, much of the research into gender appears to be undertheorised and to have little concern for the *origins* and the conditions of school processes or the *sources* of potential conflict and contradiction within gender socialisation.

Nevertheless, there are also several advantages in such cultural theory, particularly for the development of a feminist analysis of the operation of *male hegemony* in education. What such research can show is the unity of girls' experiences across class boundaries by focussing upon female education as a common experience vis-a-vis that of boys. Clarricoates (1980), for example, concludes from her research of four primary schools that even though femininity varies, "the subordination of women is always maintained . . . ."

All women, whatever their "class" (economic class for women is always in relation to men—fathers and husbands) suffer oppression. It is patriarchy in the male hierarchical ordering of society, preserved through marriage and the family via the sexual division of labour that is at the core of women's oppression; and it is schools, through their different symbolic separation of the sexes, that give their oppression the seal of approval. (Clarricoates, 1980, p. 40)

The advantage of the alternative perspective, that of political economy, is precisely the reverse of cultural theories since what this perspective can reveal is the *diversity* of class experience and the nature of *class hegemony* in education.<sup>4</sup> What becomes clear from this analysis is that working class boys and girls do actually share some experiences in school such as alienation from the school values of discipline and conformity, estrangement from school culture, and scepticism as to the validity of an ideology which stresses the possibility of individual social mobility. Admittedly most of the research on social class experience in schools has been conducted on boys, showing the homogeneity of their experiences within one social class (e.g., Corrigan, 1979; Hebdige, 1979; Willis, 1977). Empirically, there are very few studies of working class girls or middle class girls (Lambert 1976; McRobbie, 1978; McRobbie & Garber, 1975; Nava, 1981; Sharpe, 1976). As Delamont (1970) and King (1971)



amongst others have pointed out, this is an incredibly underresearched area in the sociology of education as a whole. Most of the work in the political economy perspective has been theoretical or at a macro-level of analysis.

What researchers using this perspective have in common is their concern for constructing a theory of class and gender education and for bridging the gap between Marxist theories of class reproduction and theories of gender divisions.<sup>5</sup> Curiously in this work one finds perhaps more references today to the Marxist theories of social reproduction that were popular in the mid 1970's in British sociology of education than in any other body of current educational literature.<sup>6</sup> The aim of most of this Marxist feminist work is to develop a political economy of women's education which moves out and away from the limitations of a purely cultural theory of gender, and which addresses itself to questions about the determinants of girls' schooling as well as its processes and outcomes. The starting point for much of this work has tended to be social rather than cultural reproduction theory, and in particular the theory of Louis Althusser. The reason for this interest in Althusser's (1971) work on ideological state apparatuses is that he makes the distinction between the reproduction of the labour force and the reproduction of the social relations of production. Much of the domestic labour debate has focused attention upon the role of women in fulfilling the former function for capital through biological reproduction of the next generation of workers and the daily reproduction, through servicing, of the work force (e.g., Hall, 1980; Secombe, 1973). The question which concerns Marxist feminist sociologists of education is that of the role of schooling in the social reproduction of the female waged and domestic labour forces. The differential experience of boys and girls for the first time assumes particular importance in the analysis of the social reproduction of a capitalist labour force and capitalist social relations of production. Sexual divisions of labour which segregate women and men and maintain the male hierarchy within the work place and domestic life come into direct contact with the forms of class oppression and exploitation, as well as with class cultures of resistance, in these two sites.

### *Feminism and Social Reproduction Theory*

In the context of patriarchal capitalism, explaining the nature of women's education has also created a variety of problems for the analysis of class reproduction and it is these which encourage a reformulation of that theory.<sup>7</sup> Let me for a moment give two brief examples of how existing accounts of class reproduction through education must be modified to take account of gender difference. If we look at the explanations which have been offered for the rise of mass compulsory schooling in nineteenth



century Britain, we find none of them can adequately account for the fact that girls were educated at all. Why bother to educate girls in preparation for becoming a skilled work force, when few women became such workers? Why educate women to be a literate electorate when they did not have the vote? If women were educated to become docile and conforming workers, why did they receive a different curricula from boys—since their class position would have meant that working class boys and girls had similar experiences. According to Davin (1979), none of these explanations of schooling can account for the particular pattern of girls' education. Instead one must recognise that what schools taught was the particular bourgeois family ideology in which women played a special role as dependent wife and mother. Davin argues that it was this need to educate girls into domesticity that encouraged educational policymakers to establish schools for girls as well as boys. By limiting oneself to a strictly "economic" or "political" model of schooling, the saliency of family life within the concept of "social order" would be missed entirely.

If we turn briefly now to the twentieth century, when human capital theory provided the ideological basis for so much of educational planning and decision-making, we find that even within this framework we cannot account for the development of women's education. If human capital theory did influence educational development to the extent that, for example, Bowles and Gintis (1976) suggest, then we understand that all children were prepared strictly for their future place in the work force. However as M. Woodhall (1973) argues, human capital theorists used the concepts of "investment in *man*" and "*man*-power planning," not without reason since they were mainly if not exclusively referring to men. Human capital theorists viewed women's education very differently from that of men: they saw it as "either a form of consumption, or an unprofitable form of investment given the likelihood that women have to leave the labour force after marriage, or may work short hours or in low paying occupations" (Woodhall, 1973, p. 9). The returns in terms of cost-benefit analysis on women's education would therefore be low and hardly worth the effort. According to T.W. Schultz (1970), himself a renowned human capital theorist:

If one were to judge from the work that is being done, the conclusion would be that human capital is the unique property of the male population—despite all of the schooling of females and other expenditures on them they appear to be of no account in the accounting of human capital. (p. 302-3)

Can one then ignore the differential investment in men's and women's education and the different purposes for which schooling was meant? It must be remembered that the motto "education for produc-



tion" or "education for economic efficiency and productivity" takes on specific meaning in the ideological climate of patriarchy.

If these explanations of the nineteenth and twentieth century development of schooling are inadequate to account for the rise of girls' schooling, then so are the theories which have used them as a basis for criticism such as the work of Johnson (1970) and Bowles and Gintis (1976). Theories of class cultural control and the social reproduction of class relations are inadequate precisely because they have lost the sense of the specificity of class experiences in terms of gender. While there are similarities between members of each social class there are also differences, which often can give them common ground and shared experiences with members of another class (with whom they could potentially form alliances). The problem then becomes one of trying to sort out these similarities and differences. Certainly one way in which the analysis can be improved is through the recognition of the dual origins and destinations of female *and* male students—that of the waged and domestic labour forces and the sets of social relations within both the labour process and domestic life. Another way is to recognise that women's position within the hierarchy of class relations is different from that of men. There are far fewer women employers, managers, members of high status professions, and supervisors. Very few women are likely therefore to give orders and enforce obedience. Indeed they are more likely to be what Bernstein (1977) called the agents of "symbolic control" (teachers, social workers) presenting the "soft face" of capital rather than what Althusser (1971) called the "agents of exploitation and repression." Women therefore are not easily described by a concept of class structure that is defined by the distribution of male occupations and male hierarchies of control.

Another problem in theories such as Bowles's and Gintis's (1976) is that there is no identification and analysis of the reproduction of the patriarchal basis of class relations in the work place and in the school. They ignore the fact that so many women number in the ranks in what they call the "secondary labour market" in a segmented labour force. If the principle of capitalist social relations of production is one of "divide and rule," then one cannot ascribe sex segmentation of the labour force as a subsidiary principle of class division. In my view it is a major medium of class control and also the most visible form of the principle of "divide and rule" (see MacDonald, 1981a).

Bowles and Gintis did not really get involved in discussing patriarchal relations within the social relations of production and schooling because of their view that the reproduction of the sexual division of labour occurs primarily in the family, with the mother playing an active role. They argue that it is because the family is semi-autonomous and is



actively engaged in the reproduction of *gender* divisions and the private-emotional life of the family, that capital has increasingly come to use the educational system as its primary agency for the reproduction specifically of the *class* structure and its relations. The thesis in *Unpopular Education* (CCCS, 1981) is similar; its authors argue that there are different social "sites" for the reproduction of social relations which are hard to disentangle, especially in their combined effects.

Nonetheless it is useful to think of "the factory" (in shorthand) as the main site of class relations, and the family as strongly organised around relations of gender, sexuality and age. (p. 25)

We have to be careful of this thesis of the physical and social separation of the two sites of reproduction precisely because it tends to result in giving legitimacy to research which ignores gender divisions in schools and work places and which assumes the production of gender all happens outside the school and factory walls. Second, this thesis begs the question of the nature of the relationship between class and gender divisions and between processes of class and gender reproduction which occur simultaneously in the family, the school, and the work place. Third, implicit in this separation is the assumption that the family and the work place are indeed separate and distinct destinations for both men and women and that their preparation for one location is different from the preparation for the other. But this separation is itself an ideological construction which has originated in the context of bourgeois hegemony (see Hall, 1980). It is extremely difficult to use such a dividing line for the destination of women since for many the distinction is blurred in terms of the location of their productive work (e.g., domestic industries) and their time. The reproduction of family life and the domestic sexual division of labour could just as well be described as the reproduction of class position so far as women are concerned, especially if one wished to include housewives in, rather than exclude them from, a class analysis.

The family is indeed the site of gender reproduction, but it also reproduces class cultures, ideologies, and values which are critical components of class relations. The simultaneous operation of these two processes means that specific class forms of gender divisions are constructed and reproduced in this site. Similarly the school is another site in which the two processes occur simultaneously. What is especially significant, therefore, is not the separation of the two sites, but rather the nature of family school interrelations. (See David (1978) who argues for the analysis of the "Family-Education Couple.") The transition from the private world of the family and its "lived" class culture into the public world of class divisions and sex segregation is one which is fraught with conflict between the "familiar," received class and gender identities and



those taught in the school. It is the process of transition that is the critical point at which we shall understand the ways in which the reproduction of both sets of power relations occurs. At the end of their school days, school children leave as young adults who despite their different class origins are meant to have learnt the more elaborated<sup>8</sup> and abstract definition of masculinity and femininity and to have placed themselves, using such class and gender identities, in the hierarchies of the domestic and waged labour forces.<sup>9</sup>

The development of a Marxist feminist theory of gender education, like cultural theory, has been affected by the assumptions of the body of knowledge which it is criticising. It is unfortunate that much of the political economy of gender education has repeated many of the mistakes of social reproduction theory. I am thinking here of the four major problems which Johnson (1981) argues lie in the social reproduction model requiring some modification of the model if it is to be used at all. He argues that social reproduction theory has a tendency toward functionalism, especially insofar as it does not refer to the reproduction of the contradictions and conflicts which are integral to the social relations of production and the points of class struggle arising during the process of capital accumulation. I would also add that Marxist feminist theories of social reproduction have a very real tendency to ignore any notion of gender struggle and conflict, of forms of gender resistance, of contradictions within the process of the social reproduction of the female waged and domestic work forces, and of the patriarchal relations in the family and the labour processes. They too suffer from inherent functionalism. Social reproduction theories conflate educational conditions with educational outcomes, giving the appearance that the rationales and rhetoric of state policy successfully determine the products of the educational system. This tendency is just as clear in cultural theories of gender as in the Marxist feminist analysis of the sexual division of labour. It would appear from such work that girls become "feminine" without any problems. They acquire the mantle of femininity through the experience of the family and the school and keep it for the rest of their lives. As a result, in searching historically for the common pattern of girls' schooling, there has been an overwhelming emphasis upon the pattern of subordination of girls through education, with very little emphasis upon the patterns of resistance and struggle. And yet one of the greatest women's struggles has been fought over the right of access to and social mobility through the educational system. The fight for the right to be educated represents the most public of gender struggles and yet in contemporary accounts of schooling it is either forgotten or relegated to a marginal event since it was, after all, a struggle by middle class women for middle class rights and privileges. And yet it had repercussions for all women. Also, in the



analysis of contemporary education, the most visible of struggles over education and the most visible set of problems which confronts teachers is that of controlling working class boys. The degree of attention paid by educationalists to the disciplining of boys, their degree of concern over male delinquency and truancy rates, is reflected in the amount of attention paid to working class boys in sociological studies. There is considerable neglect of the more "silent" forms of resistance by girls, whether it takes the form of daydreaming (Payne, 1980) or the form of painting their nails in class (Llewellyn, 1980; McRobbie, 1978) or of "non-attendance" at school (Shaw, 1981).

By ignoring gender struggles, Marxist feminist analyses of schooling fall into the trap of social determinism, even while rejecting as totally false other theories of determinism, such as the biological. Hence de Beauvoir can write:

The passivity that is the essential characteristic of the "feminine" woman is a trait that develops in her from the earliest years. But it is wrong to assert a biological datum is concerned: it is in fact a *destiny* imposed upon her by teachers and by society [my emphasis]. (quoted in Freeman, 1970, p. 36)

Such determinism means that social reproduction theory suffers from a latent pessimism and can leave women, and women teachers particularly, with a sense of fatality and helplessness. In the case of feminism, the "hold" of the system over women seems especially fatalistic in that women are, according to the CCCS (1981), "doubly determined."

The position of women is doubly determined and constrained: by patriarchal relations and the sexual division of labour within the home and by their patriarchally structured position within waged labour outside. (CCCS, 1981, p. 156)

However this can be put another way. What we can say is that the "consent" of women is sought to their subordination in both the home and in the waged labour force, and it is on both these fronts that they fight against class and gender control. If we forget to refer to women's struggles we also lose sight of the victories gained. Not surprisingly then, it is very hard to find an account of the political economy of women's education which points out the gains women have made in forcing their way through the barriers of social prejudice and the obstacles which men have placed in front of them to prevent their appropriation of male culture and of male-dominated professions, status, and power. It must be remembered that access to education can be liberating even within a class-controlled system, since it is not only at the level of class relations that oppression occurs. What the Marxist feminist accounts lose sight of, because of their overriding concern for Marxist class categories, is that



patriarchal oppression has its own dynamic and its own "stakes" in gender struggles, and one of the most important ones has been access to, and achievement in, education as a source of liberation.

### *Contradictions in Theories of Gender Education*

Let us now for a brief moment look at the theoretical assumptions of the two traditions within the analysis of gender education and notice the contradictions which emerge between the different analyses. It is at these points of contradiction that research possibilities are opened up and new directions can be taken in the analysis of class and gender. Here I shall identify three major contradictions between the cultural and the political economy perspective.

First, let us look at the different analyses of the relationship between the home and the school. Cultural theorists have argued that there is, by and large, a *continuity* between the home and the school. Gender socialisation appears to start at birth and continue undisturbed to adulthood. Gender definitions are not therefore class specific but societal in source and nature. Thus the school's role is to extend and legitimate the same process begun at home whatever the material circumstances of the particular family or community. The political economy perspective, on the other hand, stresses the importance of the *discontinuity* and distance between the culture of the home and the school. Working class culture is seen as markedly different from the bourgeois culture transmitted in the school. The school's role in this latter case is to select from class cultures and to legitimate only some cultural forms and styles. From this perspective school knowledge is seen as attempting to ensure the ratification of class power in an unequal society which is divided by class conflict. If this is the case, it becomes improbable that *one* pattern of gender socialisation into *one* set of gender stereotypes extends across different class cultures and across the divide of family and school. What is more likely is that the family culture and gender definitions of the bourgeoisie are transmitted in the school and it is the middle class child who will experience the least difficulty with gender roles taught in school. This view is given support, not just by personal accounts of women such as Payne (1980) who was a working class girl sent to a middle class grammar school, but also by the class history of girls' education. Marks (1976), for example, shows how definitions of masculinity and femininity were prominent categories in the development of an English school system which was class divided. She argued that her analysis had shown that "notions of femininity vary both historically and between social classes; and [are shown] to be dialectically related to the changing roles of women in society" (p. 197).



Purvis's (1980, 1981) historical research also supports this view. She has shown that what was appropriate for one social class in terms of gender was not necessarily appropriate for another. In the nineteenth century, what Purvis found was the imposition by the bourgeoisie of a different concept of femininity for the middle classes (the "perfect wife and mother") from that imposed upon the working class (the "good woman").

The ideal of the "good woman" may be seen . . . as an attempt by the bourgeoisie to solve the various social problems associated with industrialisation and urbanisation. The "good woman" was a dilution of the higher status ideal of the perfect wife and mother and thus it may be interpreted as a form of "intervention" into working class family life, an attempt to convert and transmit that part of bourgeois family ideology that insisted that a woman's place was in the home, that she was responsible for the quality of family life and that her domestic skills were more important than, say, vocational skills that might be used in waged labour. The "good woman" was, therefore, a form of class cultural control . . . an attack upon the patterns of working class motherhood and parenthood as perceived by the middle classes. (Purvis, 1980, p. 11)

The second contradiction which arises between the cultural and political economy theories is in terms of the expected effect and outcome of the education system. So much of the work on gender which has come out of the cultural perspective has stressed that the difference between Western European definitions of masculinity and femininity lie precisely in the fact that while femininity is defined as "docility, submission, altruism, tenderness, striving to be attractive, not being forceful or bold or physically strong, active or sexually potent" (Loftus, 1974, p. 4), masculinity means being aggressive, independent, competitive and superior, learning to take initiative, and lead an active out-of-doors life, etc. (Bellotti, 1975). Yet according to Bowles's and Gintis's (1976) version of social reproduction theory or even Althusser's (1971), what working class children, and in particular working class boys, learn through schooling is to obey, to take discipline, to follow rules, and to submit to hierarchy. They learn docility, which according to cultural theory is a "female" gender attribute. How then do boys cope with this difference in social expectations?

It is impossible to answer this question at the present time since there has been so little research on the problem of class and gender as competing power structures within school environments. However, as I have argued above, it is more likely that there is a discontinuity between the home and the school as a result of class divisions. This will mean that working class boys and girls will have to negotiate their way not just through class identities, but also through gender identities. Bourdieu



(1977a) has argued that the response of the working class boy and man to the "femininity" of bourgeois school culture is one of resistance, through the use of "coarse" language, manners, dress, etc. This reaffirms their class-identity but also protects their masculinity from negation by the "effeminate" style of bourgeois culture. According to Bourdieu, working class girls, on the other hand, can more easily negotiate school life and its values since the feminine identity derived from their families also stresses docility and passivity. This analysis forgets the importance of the mental-manual division and the hierarchy of knowledge, not just in the school curriculum, but also in the forms of girls' response to schooling. The inversion of the mental-manual division allows working class "lads" to celebrate their masculine identity (Willis, 1977), but also a similar inversion allows working class women to celebrate their femininity through a rejection of male culture which stresses the value of hierarchies (particularly mental over manual work), objective versus subjective knowledge, and individual competition above cooperation (See Spender, 1980b). Paradoxically then, femininity, the supposed essence of docility and conformity can become the vehicle for resisting forms of class reproduction. By playing off one set of social expectations against the other, working class girls can resist the attempts of schools to induce conformity. Unfortunately, like the forms of resistance of the "lads" which confirms their fate as manual workers, the resistance of girls only leads them to accept even more voluntarily their futures as dependent and subordinate to men, and as semi- or unskilled workers with low pay and insecure working conditions, and often in dead-end jobs. Furthermore, in neither case are the forms of class resistance of working class boys or girls likely to negate their preconceived notions of gender derived from their families. If anything they may reinforce the patriarchal relations specific to that social class by granting it more social value and potency in class resistance.

The third contradiction between the two bodies of theory lies in their conceptions of the ideology of schooling. According to cultural theories, girls' educational "underachievement" is a result of the fact that girls are "taught how to fail." Horner (1971) described the process of education as one in which girls learn to avoid and "dread success," since it means becoming a failure as women.<sup>11</sup> Alison Kelly (1981) in her study of girls' failure to study or be successful in science in schools, argues that the school actually discourages girls from achieving in these subjects in a variety of different ways. This process which she calls a "discouraging process" involves either not making science available to girls or putting them off it through conscious advice or unconscious bias in favour of boys. In contrast to this rather negative view of schools, theories of class



reproduction have argued that the dominant ideology of education taught through education is that of equality of opportunity. According to these theories, students are encouraged to see failure as individual, resulting from their lack of ability. Now this may be the case today where class is a hidden category of education practice and where the categories of educational divisions are in terms of high to low academic ability. However, it is still possible to find gender being used as a very explicit allocating device for curriculum design, options, and routes, as well as for classroom organisation, the labelling of pupils, etc., in a way that is no longer socially acceptable with social class. It is also still possible to find girls' failure at school described as natural since "she is only a girl." Female students as a group can expect not to succeed and their collective failure is visible. Indeed as Wolpe (1976) has argued, the official ideology of equality of opportunity was modified to fit the "special needs or interests" of girls, so that it referred to future expectations of domestic life rather than the rewards to be gained from social mobility through better employment prospects. The illusion of meritocracy, which Bowles and Gintis attacked as being prevalent in schools, must be treated with caution therefore since it may only be an illusion of *male meritocracy*, taught to the working class. What is even more interesting is that when the expansion of the universities occurred in Britain in the 1960's, it was with some despair that Hutchinson and McPherson (1976) reported from their studies of Scottish University undergraduates that equality of opportunity had benefitted middle class women *at the expense of* working class men. These women had, in their words, "displaced" those working class men who had successfully made their way through the school system and were knocking upon the university doors. There were therefore two "competing" ideologies of equality of opportunity, not one. No concern was shown for the drastically low numbers of working class women who reached the university and whose numbers were quoted as being "stable" (hence uninteresting) *despite* the expansion of the university sector. The impression is gained therefore that class equality of opportunity refers to the male working class and gender equality of opportunity to middle class women. Possibly the fact that working class women have not gained by this opening up of opportunities is because their subjective assessment of their objective possibilities for entry into higher education and for social mobility has led them to limit their own education aspirations. Their assessment may well have "penetrated" (to use Willis's term) the fact that meritocracy is for men. Perhaps, as Sharpe's (1976) study has suggested, they have accepted a more satisfying alternative—the ambition to become a wife and mother—rather than compete in vain for access to a male world.



## *Developing a Theory of Cultural Production*

Up until now, I have focussed on some of the problems of using social reproduction theory to develop a feminist account of girls' schooling, and I have pointed out some of the dangers of not addressing oneself to the questions concerning the determinants of schooling under capitalism. Here I shall turn to theories of cultural reproduction, which I think have been ignored by feminists using either the cultural or the political economy perspective. It is possible that cultural reproduction theories have been avoided because the relevance of this work for a theory of gender is not obvious, especially since it appears to refer only to class. However, even though Bernstein's (1977, 1980) research has been adopted (and transformed) in the context of Marxist theories of education developed in the 1970's, I believe that his theory of classification systems, of the social construction of categories and "classes" (in the neutral sense of social groups), can be very useful in developing a general theory of gender differences and relations and in setting out the premises for research in schools. I think that one can develop a theory of gender codes which is class based and which can expose the structural and interactional features of gender reproduction and conflict in families, in schools, and in work places. The idea of a gender code relates well to the concept of hegemony since both concepts refer to the social organisation of family and school life where the attempt is made to "win over" each new generation to particular definitions of masculinity and femininity and to accept as natural the hierarchy of male over female, the superiority of men in society. The concept of code also allows one to develop a structural analysis of school culture which avoids seeing the problem of gender inequality as one simply of attitudes which have no material basis. The political and economic distribution of power between men and women in our society is reproduced through the structural organisation of school life, as one of its major agencies; yet schools are also the critical reproductive agencies of class cultures and their principles of organisation. In this sense gender codes can be related to an analysis of class codes in schools.

The first major premise of any theory of gender must be that gender categories are in a very important sense arbitrary social constructs. The arbitrary nature of their contents, both historically and in terms of social class, is the product of "work" carried out by a variety of social institutions and agents (e.g., schools, churches, the mass media—teachers, priests, authors, film producers). The active nature of the production of a category called gender is captured nicely in Eileen Byrne's (1978) definition:



Gender is the collection of attitudes which society *stitches together* (dress behaviour, attributed personality traits, expected social roles, etc.) to clothe boys and girls [emphasis added]. (p. 254)

Gender classification differs from that of sex in the sense that whereas the former is totally socially constructed, the other is biologically based. However, what I believe they have in common is that, like the notions of male and female sex, gender is in fact an arbitrary dichotomy imposed upon what is essentially a continuum. The questions we have to ask then are how and why are gender categories constructed in the way they are? We obviously need an historical analysis to sort out the specificity of our particular version of this dichotomy, our principle of classification, so that we can seek the source of that principle in the changing class relations contained within educational history. Further, we need to look for alternative sources of gender division that can be found in those social classes which have not appropriated the medium of the school to transmit their principles of gender difference.

The second premise is that gender classifications are not universal, nor societal, nor are they static or simple. Indeed they are highly complex in the sense that in order to construct two seemingly mutually exclusive categories which can apply to any range of social contexts, considerable work has to be done to pull together, or as Byrne put it, to "stitch together" a diversity of values and meanings. The tension within each category is as great as that between each category. Think for example of the contradiction which women face in trying to make sense of such antagonistic images of femininity as being both dependable and dependent, of being a sexual temptress and sexually passive, of being childlike and mothering, and of being a capable and intelligent consumer as well as being politically and economically inept. Unfortunately so much of the work identifying stereotypes in masculinity and femininity has focussed on the consistency rather than the contradiction within these categories. The imposed compatibility of different "narrative structures" in which girls have to construct a coherent female identity has to be "worked at" rather than assumed to exist, in order to produce what Althusser might have called a "teeth gritting harmony."

The third major premise is that gender categories are constructed through a concept of gender difference which Chodorow (1979) has argued is essential to the analysis of male hegemony. The hierarchy of men over women is based upon an ideology of gender difference which is manifested in the structural division of men and women's lives, their education, their dress, their morality, and their behaviour, etc. The ideology may be founded upon a theory of supposed natural divisions. This ideology then successfully hides the fact that gender is a cultural



variable and one which is constructed within the context of class and gender power relations. The source and nature of the imposition of gender differences is so concealed that the power of the dominant class and the dominant sex is increased by such unconscious legitimation.

Yet how is the consent won to particular arbitrary definitions of masculinity and femininity by both men and women, so that they treat such classifications as natural and inevitable? One of the ways in which male hegemony is maintained is obviously through schooling, where it is most easy to transmit a specific set of gender definitions, relations, and differences while appearing to be objective. The opportunity to transmit a gender code is, however, not open to any social class, but rather to the bourgeoisie who have appropriated, more than any other class, the educational system for themselves. The dominant form of male hegemony within our society is therefore that of the bourgeoisie. That is not to say that the classification of gender used by the working class or the aristocracy has not entered the school. As we have already seen in the work of Willis and McRobbie, it is these categories and definitions of masculinity and femininity from the working class that provide the vehicle for classroom and social class resistance. The aristocratic ideal of masculinity can be found in the English public schools, where the concept of the amateur sportsman, the gentleman, and the benevolent paternal leader are in contrast to the grammar school bourgeois ideals of the hard working scientist, scholar, or artist. Matched to each ideal is its antithesis of "non-masculinity"—the complementary ideals of femininity—the hostess, the good wife and mother, the career woman, etc.

If we return very briefly to the separation of home and work discussed earlier, we can now relate it to the production of gender difference through a class-based classification system. Historically as Davin (1979) and Hall (1980) have shown, the nineteenth century saw the development of the bourgeois family form (with its male breadwinner, its dependent housekeeping wife and dependent children) and its imposition upon the working class through educational institutions. Implicit in this social construction was the notion of two spheres which distinguished and segregated the world of women and men. This classification of male and female worlds was made equivalent to and imposed upon a further classification—that of work and family (or put another way, the distinction between the public world of production and the private world of consumption). This latter ideological construction, despite having a material basis as the continuing development of the factory and office systems, nevertheless has to be continually reinforced in day-to-day life. In this sense, the division between family and work which so many sociologists of education take for granted can also be seen as an *ideological* division which is part of bourgeois hegemony. The structural imposition of the



gender classification upon this other division unites the hierarchy of class relations with that of gender relations since it allows for the exploitation of women by both men and capital. Hence the productive world becomes "masculine" even though so many women work within it, and the family world becomes "feminine" even though men partner women in building a home. As Powell and Clarke (1976) argue, this classification helps create the political and economic "invisibility" of women.

It is the dominant ideological division between *Home* and *Work* which structures the invisibility of women and not their real absence from the world of work. Their identification solely with the "privatised" world of the family has masked, firstly, the historical (not natural—and for a long time very uneven) removal of work from the home, and secondly the continuing presence of working women. (It also masks the man's presence in the home). Men and women do not inhabit two empirically separated worlds, but pass through the same institutions in different relations and on different trajectories. (p. 226)

In understanding the differential experience of girls and boys in schools, we should pay particular attention to the way in which the school constructs a particular relationship between, for example, home and work and how it prepares the two sexes in different ways for these two destinations. Thus boys and girls are meant to learn a different relation to the bourgeois classification of public and private worlds, of family and work, of male and female spheres. Schools teach boys how to maintain the importance of those distinctions and to see their futures in terms of paid work. (There is little if any training for fatherhood in schools.) Boys are trained to acquire the classification in its strongest form, to make the distinction between work and nonwork, masculinity and nonmasculinity. Hence they avoid academic subjects which are considered to be "feminine," "domestic," and personal/emotional. Their masculinity is premised upon maintaining the distinctiveness of the two spheres, since it is in that hierarchy that their power is based. Girls on the other hand, are taught to *blur* the distinction between family and work for themselves, to see an extension of identity from domestic activities to work activities, to extend their domestic skills to earn an income, and to use their employment for the benefit of their domestic commitments, rather than for themselves. Their construction of the work/family division differs from one which they accept as natural for men, and so they too maintain the classification even though it is not directly applicable to themselves. Thus as Powell and Clarke (1976) point out, the dimensions of possible activity for both sexes are constructed around the oppositions of work/nonwork, management/labour, and work/leisure, but in the case of women, the opposition family/non-family overshadows all the others.



We can describe through research the ways in which the schools structure the experience of boys and girls in such a way as to transmit specific gender classifications with varying degrees of boundary strength and insulation between the categories of masculine and feminine and a hierarchy of male over female, based upon a specific ideology of legitimization. Through classroom encounters where boys and girls experience different degrees and types of contact with the teacher, through the different criteria for evaluating boys' and girls' behaviour, and through the curriculum texts and the structured relations of the school, limits are set to the degree of negotiation of gender that is possible within the school. In this sense the school *frames* the degree and type of response to that gender code. What is relevant therefore is not just an analysis of the structural aspects of gender codes but also the *form* of interaction within school social relations.<sup>12</sup>

Using a notion of gender code, we can recognize that while the school attempts to determine the identities of its students, it is also involved in a process of transmission in which the student takes an active role. First the student is active in inferring the underlying rules from a range of social relations between men and women (between parents, teachers, pupils, etc.). Students learn to recognise and make sense of a wide range and variety of contradictory and miscellaneous inputs, and the results are not always predictable, especially since they relate these school messages to the alternatives which they have experienced or derived from their families, their peer group, the mass media, etc. The student will undergo a process of actively transforming these various messages and will produce at the end, in a temporary sense, a constellation of behaviour and values which can be called "femininity" or "masculinity". What the school attempts to do is to produce subjects who unconsciously or consciously consent to the dominant version of gender relations. This does not mean, however, that if it fails, patriarchal relations are challenged, since, it must be remembered, in all social classes it is the men who are dominant and hold power.

Men and women become the embodiment of a particular gender classification by internalising and "realising" the principle which underlies it. They externalise their gendered identities through their behaviour, language, their use of objects, their physical presence, etc. It is through this process of "realisation" that the dialectics of objective structures and social action are created. In the process of producing classed and gendered subjects who unconsciously recognise and realise the principles of social organisation, the reproduction of such power relations are ensured. Thus individuals internalise the objective and external structures and externalise them, albeit transformed but not radically challenged. The potential for rejecting such definitions is inherent within the process, for as Bernstein (1980) argues, the recognition of principles



of classification does not determine the realisation (or practice); it can only set the limits upon it. What appears to be a smooth process of repetition is in fact one in which the contradictions, the struggles, and the experience of individuals are suppressed. As Bernstein (1980) has argued, "any classification system suppresses potential cleavages, contradictions and dilemmas."

The fact that there is a dominant gender code (i.e., that of the bourgeoisie) means that there are also dominated gender codes (those of the working class or different ethnic groups). The experience of learning the principles of the dominant gender code is therefore the experience of learning class relations where working class family culture is given illegitimate and low status at school. Interestingly, the form of class reproduction may occur through the very formation of gender identities which we have been talking about. Further class resistance may be manifested through resistance to gender definitions. However, and this is really a very important point, in neither the dominant nor the dominated gender codes do women escape from their inferior and subordinate position. There is nothing romantic about resisting school through a male-defined working class culture. It is at this point that women across social class boundaries have much in common.

### *Concluding remarks*

Briefly then, I think that any research in the area of women's education should have two essential features. First, it should recognise the existence of both class and male hegemony within educational institutions and the sometimes difficult relationship which exists between them. Second, it should be aware that any set of social relations, such as class or gender relations, constitute a social dynamic in which the forces of order, conflict, and change are contained. The process of what Freire (1972) called "domestication" in the case of girls implies a dialectic of oppression and struggle against class-based definitions of femininity. It is the dual nature of that struggle which allows women to seek allies simultaneously in their own social class and amongst women in different social classes. Somehow our research must capture the unity *and* the diversity of the educational lives of women.

### *Notes*

1. Production is used here to refer to the act of *social construction* either by institutions such as schools, the mass media, etc., or by individuals.

2. A. McRobbie is referring here to the work of Paul Willis (1977) and Dick Hebdige (1979).



3. Examples of a "cultural perspective" are Kelly (1981), Frazier and Sadker (1973), Belotti (1975), Delamont (1980), Lobban (1975).
4. Examples of a "political economy perspective" are Barrett (1980), David (1978, 1980), Deem (1978, 1981), MacDonald (1980b, 1981a), Wolpe (1978a, 1978b). For full references see Arnot (1981).
5. By social reproduction theory I am referring to the work of Althusser (1971) and Bowles and Gintis (1976).
6. It is interesting that despite the development of the cultural theory of gender, the cultural reproduction theory found in Bernstein (1977) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977b) has not generally been used, or even referred to.
7. The most contentious area, which cannot be treated here, is obviously the appropriateness of using existing Marxist definitions of social class for describing women's economic and political position. For this debate see for example Barrett (1980), MacDonald (1981a), West (1978).
8. I am using Bernstein's (1977) concept here to show that in schools children are taught the middle class cultural definition of gender that appears to be "context independent" and thus neutral and generalisable.
9. This would obviously only occur in times of full employment. In the present context, being "working class" and "female" is often a qualification for unemployment.
10. See B. Bernstein (1977), Introduction.
11. Similar arguments are put forward in contributions to Spender and Sarah (1980).
12. See "On the Classification and Framing of Knowledge," Bernstein (1977).

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## 6. A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAMILY LIFE AND SCHOOL LIFE\*

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*Family-school relations as presented in a political economy of education are critically examined. The ways in which the separation of family and work is reinforced and the distinction between male and female spheres is legitimated are analysed within three different relationships: between schools and the economy, schooling and work, and the family and school. New ways of understanding school experience are suggested through a review of new research on family cultures and the reproduction of female class relations. The paper concludes with a call to reintegrate family and work relations, to reassess our assumptions about the family and the formation of class and gender identities, and to develop a feminist perspective within a revised political economy of education.*

In this article I will examine, from a feminist perspective, the approach to education developed by left-wing sociologists in the 1970s in Britain and the United States. It is now accepted by many that the mainstream left discourse on the sociology of education was constructed primarily by male academics who have continued to focus almost entirely on boys' educational experiences. This bias, fortunately, has been partially remedied by new feminist research on girls' experience in school and their transition into waged and domestic work. However, while this research is a necessary first step, it does not solve the full range of problems created by the mainstream left discourse. The standard theories are also deficient in the way they pose the relationship of the family to mass schooling and, more specifically, the relationship between class and gender in both the family and the school.

The problem has not been a lack of theorizing about the relationship between class and gender, but the nature of the theories that have become entrenched. The relationship has been formulated in such a way that the separation of family and work (—and with it) the division of the

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male public world and the female domestic sphere—has been legitimated. As a result, I will argue, the family has been located outside the economy. It has been portrayed as being insignificant as a social determinant of schooling, and therefore its internal dynamics have not been thought worthy of study. I will also argue that the ideology of *familism*, unlike that of vocationalism, has been inadequately treated as an aspect of social class differentiation. What I will then discuss is the new research on family and school relations which, in my view, has opened the door to a more sensitive and less biased political economy of education and a better grasp of the complexities of class and gender relations.

Although I will be critical of the existing political economy perspective, I think it is essential to remember the main premises of that theory. Within capitalist societies, economic, political, and cultural power is distributed unequally since such societies are based upon the extraction of surplus value. Social class relations represent the relations of exploitation and oppression within such societies. It is not surprising, therefore, that social class has been found to be statistically the most significant indicator of the length and type of an individual's education. It affects the shape of educational careers, the nature of schooling and training received, and the possibility of a higher education after compulsory schooling. It does this for both men and women, for all ethnic groups, and for individuals in all geographic regions within that society. Reid (1981) finds that in Britain, "successful completion of some form of higher education is almost exclusively associated with membership of the non-manual or middle classes, consequently the lack of it with membership of the manual or working classes" (p. 207). Class identity is also the basis from which individuals, albeit often unconsciously, derive their social identities, their occupational aspirations and life styles, their forms of consciousness, and their political interests and activities. Westergaard and Resler (1974) argued that in a capitalist society neither gender, age, region, nor skin color "has the force, the sweeping repercussions of class inequality":

None of them in itself produces the communality of condition which marks class position in the economic order: a common complex of life circumstances shared by the victims; a contrasting set of life circumstances held in common by the privileged; broadly common ambiguities of condition among those who are neither clearly victims nor clearly privileged. (p. 352)

They argue that to recognize the effects of social class inequality and raise it to higher explanatory status than other social cleavages, such as gender and race, is not necessarily to dismiss the latter as "unreal or unimportant." Rather we are encouraged to recognize the *total nature of social inequality and the effect of social class divisions upon these other*



*social divisions*. As Westergaard and Resler point out, "the economic divisions of class...in turn give variations of character and shape to the manifestations of inequality by sex or age, region or colour, at different levels of the class structure" (p. 352). It is this "structuring power" of class relations which I believe provides us with the focus for a revised political economy of education. It opens up a whole range of new questions. For example, how has male power (or hegemony) been affected by the power relations of the class structure? How have the two processes of domination—class and male hegemony—come together to shape the educational system and the ideology and practice of its pupils, students, teachers, and administrators? How do individuals form their class and gender identities in sets of social relationships which are often contradictory and ambiguous? How do individuals make sense of the presence of a double division of the world, with antagonistic social classes and two antagonistic sexes?

Maintaining a political economy perspective is also important theoretically, since without an analysis of the material basis of education we can easily fall into the trap of taking for granted the official and liberal versions of the school's neutrality and its ability to act as an independent agent of social reform. It is in this context that I have criticized what I called the *cultural theory of gender*, which is the dominant paradigm in the sociology of women's education (Arnot 1981, 1982). At the level of description, this research is at its strongest. It gives insights to teachers, parents, and pupils and to educational planners into what and where the educational problems are for girls in a school system that tends, particularly in this century, to hide its own gender bias. The research analyzes the internal processes of schools which discriminate against girls, which discourage them from taking high-status school subjects (e.g., science), from attending university, and from entering the male world of political and economic power. Such research focuses on *how* girls come to "underachieve" at school, why they fail to compete equally with boys for entry into high-status professions and careers, and so forth. The prescriptions for social reform which such cultural theory suggests, however, are reduced in their potency precisely because of the lack of understanding of the conditions under which female education has developed. Cultural theory fails to analyze the power basis which has kept alive the arbitrary construction of gender differences, the transmission of an ideology of natural sex differences, and the maintenance of gender inequalities in education either through segregation or through differential treatment. Thus, girls' underachievement appears to be strictly an *educational problem* with an *educational solution*—that of changing individual attitudes. This approach does not identify the structural basis of women's oppression and exploitation in the home and in the waged labor



process, which shapes those sex role ideologies and the sexual division of labor. This is precisely the critical cutting edge that political economy offered.

Despite these problems, research with a cultural perspective is valuable for feminists for its focus upon the actual experiences of girls and its very real sense of the injustices involved in the relationship between men and women. Feminists concerned with the oppression and exploitation of women are far more likely to be drawn to such cultural theory than to the male-dominated and -developed paradigm of political economy. Up until recently, nearly all discussion of the sexism of teachers, of sexual harassment of girls and female teachers, of the sexism of school material has been located within such cultural models of education rather than in the Marxist or critical sociology of education. Only too often, the political economy of education has identified the structural basis of women's oppression in capitalism and then has neglected or ignored the concrete reality of that oppression in the relationships between men and women, boys and girls. This can be seen, for example, in the ways in which three major sets of social relations have been defined and discussed: the relationship between schools and the economy, the relationship between school and work, and the relationship between school and the family. In each of these areas, the mainstream left approach has avoided questions that might have been asked and which might have allowed the investigation of women and their particular conditions of living to enter the radical sociological discourse.

### *Schools and the Economy*

The political economy perspective has debated forcefully the degree of dependence and autonomy that schools enjoy within the capitalist economy. Such analyses describe the capitalist economy by the social relations of the waged labor process, particularly in the factory and occasionally in the office. Assumptions are made that economic work means paid work, that efficiency refers to productivity in the waged labor force and that there is essentially only one labor force. However, as we now realize, the family and its labor force cannot be excluded from an analysis of capitalism. The separation of work and family life (the division of production and consumption) was shaped historically by the changing demands of a capitalist system of production, to the benefit of the capital-owning bourgeoisie. This separation of work and family, reinforced through ideologies of the family and "the home," has marginalized and "privatized" the family to the extent that it no longer appears to have a central role in economic life. Domestic work is not defined as 'real' work and *de facto* housewives appear to be outside the 'real' world of economic life.



Sociologists of education, by defining the economic mode of production as that based on the exploitation of waged workers only, have contributed their own ideological support to this process of separation. The family, no longer defined as part of the economy, is not seen as playing any major role in the formation of school life. Because of this, crucial aspects of the relationship between families and schooling cannot be adequately explained or accounted for. These include the transfer of control over "schooling" from the family to the state, how this transfer has shaped the custodial functions of schools, and how the state has been constituted *in loco parentis* (Shaw, 1981).

The search for the social origins of education in just the "industrial" sector produces a one-sided and simplified account of schooling. This account has the effect of ignoring the family-education couple (c.f. Althusser, 1971). David (1978) has argued that this results in a marginalization of women's educational role as mothers and teachers (particularly in early schooling). The content of their pedagogic work has been defined as part of gender reproduction but not class reproduction, as it involves "expressive" and emotional training and the development of the child's personality—characteristics unrelated, apparently, to the formation of class identity. Zaretsky (1976), on the other hand, alerted us to the centrality of such "affective" development in the maintenance of the capitalist social formation. Chamboredon and Prevot (1975) recognized that the division between "spontaneous" forms of pedagogy (which typify the work of mothers in childcare and teachers in primary schools) and the more "instrumental" pedagogic styles (found in secondary schools) is one which reproduces not only the sexual division of labor but also bourgeois *class culture*.

The analysis of mass schooling which limited discussion to the requirements of capital for a skilled workforce or a literate electorate also could not account for the rise of girls' schooling—especially, as Davin (1979) has pointed out, since women were not in skilled jobs and did not have the vote. The rationale for providing girls with education in the 19th century was to transmit the bourgeois family form through schooling. Given this, it is clear that in Marxist accounts of schooling the historical difference between working-class boys' and girls' education could not be understood.

### *Schooling and Work*

The relationship between pupils' education and their future employment has concerned diverse educational theorists from government planners to human capital theorists and left-wing sociologists. For human capital theorists, seeking to estimate the cost-effectiveness of education, the problem has been that women have tended to enter the



labor force spasmodically and to receive less benefit (defined as income) than men for their comparable educational qualifications. The solution was that since women could not be included in *manpower* estimates and *manpower* planning, they were excluded from the analysis (Woodhall, 1973). For government educationalists, the issue of a pupil's destination after school was solved in the case of girls since it was assumed they would all marry and have children and that paid work was only a secondary concern for them.

Without putting it so baldly, left-wing sociologists of education have really been making the same assumption. For them, as for the other theorists, the "problem" of social class mobility and the reproduction of social classes has been the question of *boys'* education. This paradigm marked the work of, among others, Bowles and Gintis (1976), Willis (1977), and Corrigan (1979). The relationship between girls' education and their occupational destinies was not studied as a class issue, nor was the nature and extent of their social mobility examined. The other side of the coin was that boys were only perceived as having one destination—waged work—so that schools were not investigated in terms of how far they contributed to the formation of fathers and husbands. Did schools prepare boys, through the ideology of the male breadwinner, for their roles as head of the household and patriarchal authority? Instead of investigating the *relationship* between the family and the waged labor process and how boys and girls are prepared by schools for *both* destinations in different ways, such radical analyses legitimated the artificial separation of the two spheres.

The concern with the outcomes of schooling as defined by paid employment (or unemployment) led many sociologists to concentrate their efforts on understanding the last years of secondary schooling. It is at this point in their school lives that boys are most likely to become truants, to develop their own subcultures, to acquire or not acquire certificates, and to plan their entry into an occupation. If there is any similarity between schools and "the long shadow of work," then it would be found in these last years of secondary schooling. The fact that gender theorists had urged the significance of the early years of schooling for the formation of children's identities appeared to be largely irrelevant to the majority of radical sociologists. (Apple & King, 1977, and Sharp & Green, 1975, are interesting exceptions to this pattern.) By the end of the 1970s, the educational system had been portrayed largely by a snap shot of the final years of secondary school life, with little account taken of the earlier (or later) years of schooling. If, however, the family had been taken as a destination for boys and girls alike, then surely the theorists would have had to deal with the ways in which schooling—from the very start—affects the formation of class and gender identity.



## Family and School

The interest of critical sociologists of education in the relationship between the family and the school has been intermittent. In the 1960s and 1970s, a concern for working-class underachievement in schools led to theories of cultural deprivation which outlined the importance of family culture. Such theories recognized that schools transmit the culture, the educational criteria, and the social expectations of the bourgeoisie. What was important for the child, therefore, was the distance between his or her family class culture and that of the school. Such theories emphasized the central role the family played in mediating a class-determined education. However, in criticizing the thesis that working-class families were in some way "culturally deprived" and faulty, radical sociologists turned away from the family toward more "economic" explanations of school failure. The central focus was on how schools reinforce the privilege of the bourgeoisie and the exploitation of the working class, through preparation for paid work.

In these new accounts of schooling, pupils were portrayed as "negotiating" the messages of their teachers, while in the home, learning appeared to take place via a process of "assimilation." The family was seen as a depository of class culture, derived from the fathers' experiences as waged workers. All of the fathers' dependents were assumed to have acquired his class consciousness. There was an assumption that class culture and its forms of consciousness were *donated* rather than being learned in any active sense. The dynamics of family life and the conditions under which children acquire their class identities were not investigated. Rather, culture was seen as a form of *capital*, owned primarily by the bourgeoisie and *inherited* by its children, a form of property which was "non-negotiable," but could be exchanged for educational qualifications and eventually social privilege. The result was that there was no concept of struggle within families, especially since the study of youth cultures rejected the generation gap, and theories of adolescence as age-determined. The emphasis upon social class forced generational studies (and gender relations) out of mainstream sociology of education. Family culture tended to be represented as an "input" into schooling, through the apparently unproblematic construction of working-class or middle-class identities. Yet generational conflict between mothers and daughters and fathers and sons over appropriate definitions of gender are also part of the process of acquiring a class identity.

Most people know from their own experience of family life that there is conflict within families, especially over the notions of femininity and masculinity. But this insight has generally been neglected by sociologists of education. While McRobbie (1978) and Thomas (1980) show that



teenage girls believe they have close friendships with their mothers, there has been no investigation of how these friendships reflect a female alliance against males and in particular against the father's authority and behavior in the home (Newsom, Richardson, & Scaife, 1978). Similarly, we do not know how the sex alliance between fathers and sons can be used in family struggles.

Codes of behavior for both girls and boys are constructed out of the ideological materials available to them, from the sets of age, gender, and class relations. Contradiction characterizes their experiences. Hebdige (1979) has argued (in the case of black male youth) that contradictions of location and ideology can produce a new youth "style" which "is not *necessarily* in touch, in any immediate sense, with [their] material position in the capitalist system" (p. 81). In other words, there is no automatic transference from male working-class culture to that of male youth subculture. Wilson's (1978) research shows that teenage working-class girls face a major contradiction between "promiscuity which appears to be advocated by the 'permissive society' and the ideal of virginity advocated by official agencies, and to a large degree, the families" (p. 68). The working-class girls in Wilson's study constructed their own *sexual code* which determined whom to have sex with and under what circumstances. Their self-classification distinguished between "virgins," "one-man girls," and "easy lays." Girls negotiated the form of femininity prescribed by their parents and the alternative versions offered, for example, by the mass media. The new sexual code therefore did not just grow out of their class position.

The resistance of girls to their parental culture is very often dismissed as being a marginal phenomenon. It is explained as a demonstration that the girl wishes to be "just like a boy" (an apparently perfectly natural thing) rather than resisting the pressures to be a traditional girl. Yet, in her study of female juvenile delinquents, Shacklady-Smith (1978) shows that these girls positively reject male supremacy and family definitions of femininity. She shows how these girls develop self-conceptions of being "tough, dominant and tomboyish" by fighting, getting drunk, having sexual intercourse, and being aggressive. What they were involved in was a "double rejection" of legal norms and the traditional stereotyped conceptions of femininity, perceived by the girls as too constraining. Here again, we find a negotiation rather than an assimilation of family culture.

The school and the family can have a range of different types of relationships, which cannot be easily described either by the physical notion of distance or by the use of a dichotomy of working-class and middle-class cultures. Schools can "add to," by reinforcing, family culture. They can also act "against" family and thus cause contradic-



tions and conflict for the child. Finally, they can be a progressive force—for example, setting up new models of gender relations which are liberating for girls. It is especially this third aspect of family-school relations which has been lost in Marxist accounts of school life. Yet schools do offer some working-class girls access to higher status and “cleaner” occupations (such as nursing and teaching) than their mothers’ manual work. Schools may provide a means of breaking down gender stereotypes of women’s inferiority by giving them a means to improve their relative standing vis-a-vis men. This was certainly the case in Fuller’s (1980) study of West Indian girls in British schools. These girls were in favor of school and of obtaining academic qualifications since these would allow them to challenge the double stereotypes of “blackness” and femininity. Similarly, we can view the increase in the numbers of middle-class girls who enter higher education as not just the increasing hold of the bourgeoisie over the university sector, but also a victory for women over their ascribed status in society. The fight for education has played a significant role in the quest for equality between the sexes, and it is a role that has been largely ignored in critical histories of education.

### *Family Cultures*

I would now like to turn to work which does focus upon family-school relations. This area contains, in my view, some of the most interesting new developments in the analysis of class and gender. What characterizes this research is an interest in the consistency or inconsistency faced by members of different social classes and sexes in the messages they receive in these different contexts. As a result, I feel that the complex dynamics of the lived experience of class and gender relations are beginning to be glimpsed and that the ambiguities which mark a system such as patriarchal capitalism are being brought into focus for the first time.

Ve Henricksen (1981) offers an initial foray into the consistencies and contradictions experienced by different social classes and the two sexes. She points out the similarity of training offered to working-class and middle-class girls—a training for family life. This training encompasses the notion of *familism*, which she defines as an “exaggerated identification with the myth that the family is the only place where a woman may experience self-fulfillment.” Girls are taught at an early age that their future means becoming mothers and housewives, and they are expected to plan their futures in accordance with this fact. Boys of whatever class are, on the other hand, pushed toward a belief in individual achievement, self-interest, and material success—what Ve



Henricksen calls *individuation* (or in other words, the capitalist ethic). Class differences may however, have an important effect on the strength of an individual's belief in such ideologies. For example, Gaskell's (1977-78) research in British Columbian schools showed that working-class girls were even more conservative than middle-class girls in emphasizing sex roles in the home, male power, femininity, and the stability of sex roles. From a class perspective Ve Henricksen argues that whereas the middle-class children are socialized into the ideologies of social mobility and achievement in work, the working class's own culture stresses solidarity and collectivity in work, consciousness, and culture. These class cultures cause dilemmas for middle-class girls who have to juggle the dual expectations of being a wife and having a full-time job at the same time. They also cause dilemmas for working-class boys who are expected to be individually successful and to participate in the meritocratic rat race while conforming to the working-class ideals of collective action. The middle-class boy, with the dual identities of individuation and social mobility, experiences a certain consistency of demands made on him; so do working-class girls, who can find a certain compatibility in the dual demands of family life and collective working-class solidarity.

While Ve Henricksen's theory is sensitive to the contradictions which can occur within the family, she neglects to discuss the conflict which can occur *between* family and school class cultures. She ignores the imposition of bourgeois values upon working-class children through the development of state schooling, arguing that the key reference groups for each generation are only "family, friends and school teachers." There is no analysis of the differences between parental attitudes, the class-based assumptions of schools and school teachers, and the particular forms of peer-group cultures developed by pupils. The contradictions between these are critical aspects of the lived experiences of boys and girls of all social classes. It is these contradictions which form the basis of the research by Australian sociologists Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, and Dowsett (1982). These authors reject the view that families are self-contained and closed units, "havens from a heartless world." They also reject the view that families and schools are separate spheres, pointing out that pupils are not in transition from one institution to another but actually live in families while they attend school. The issue for them is the link between family circumstance and schooling. By taking into account the organization of work, the location and type of home, and the relations between the sexes within each family, the authors conclude that families are places "where larger structures meet and interact." As they put their view;

We do not mean to suggest that families are simply the pawns of outside forces any more than schools are. In both cases, class and gender relations



create dilemmas (some insoluble), provide resources (or deny them), and suggest solutions (some of which don't work), to which the family or school must respond in its collective practice. (p. 73)

A family is, in their definition, a closely knit group which has an intense inner life and a reasonably stable organization. Further, this group of individuals makes choices and takes certain paths through the variety of situations it has to confront—marriage, work, having children, the schooling of their children, unemployment, and so forth. In terms of socialization, therefore, Connell and his colleagues argue that a family does not form a child's character and then deliver it prepackaged on the doorstep of the school. Rather, "the family is what its members do, a constantly continuing and changing practice, and, as children go to and through school, that practice is reorganised around their schooling" (p. 78). According to these sociologists, *families produce people*, rather than reproduce social relations or class cultures in the abstract, and they produce them under often "terrible constraints," including the constraints imposed by existing class and gender relations in society. The result is not predictable in every case. But what they see as vital is for sociologists to follow the consequences of such processes of production. In the schools, the consequences can be found in the variety of strategies adopted by pupils from different family circumstances. These strategies—such as compliance, pragmatism and resistance—can all be adopted by a pupil and used with different teachers. The impact of such different strategies, nevertheless, is not one which is likely to destroy the processes of social class reproduction.

### *The Reproduction of Female Class Relations*

I would now like to turn briefly to the new feminist historical work on the development of mass schooling. Here a new awareness is being developed as to the particular ways in which class and gender relations come together for girls. What does seem to be the case historically is that girls' education went across class lines in that both middle-class and working-class girls were prepared for their domestic futures by an educational ideology that stressed service to their menfolk rather than to themselves. But the precise notions of femininity presented to middle-class and working-class girls were not the same. Middle-class girls were offered the bourgeois ideal of the "perfect wife and mother"—an ideal which encompassed the notion of the Christian virtues of self-denial, patience, and silent suffering as well as the aristocratic values of ladylike behavior (which meant refusing any paid or manual employment) and ladylike etiquette. What the working-class girls received was a diluted and modified vision of the 'good woman'—an image of the 'good woman,' wife, mother and housekeeper who had no pretension of becoming a lady and



aspiring above her station. Such an ideal envisaged working-class family caretakers who would prevent their families from slipping into crime, political ferment, disease, and immorality—and who in many cases would be reliable domestic servants for their middle-class counterparts (Purvis, 1980, 1981).

This dilution of the dominant gender definition can most probably be found today in the courses for the “least able” girls. These girls are taught the practical skills of cooking and domestic science as preparation for female roles in the family. In contrast, middle-class girls are most likely to be learning the arts and languages, social sciences and history—subjects more suitable for their role as educated mothers and domestic hostesses. It is difficult to know what differences there are between the notions of femininity expected of working-class and middle-class girls in schools today since so much of the research neglects class differences in favor of showing how girls as a group are treated differently than boys. What research there is, such as that by Douglas (1964) and Hartley (1978), suggests that teachers label working-class and middle-class girls differently in the classroom. The higher the social class the better behaved the pupil was seen to be. Working-class girls were seen as much rougher and noisier, much less tidy, and much less able to concentrate.

Connell and his colleagues, in this context, talk about the school's role in producing rather than reproducing masculinity and femininity, through what they call *masculinizing* and *feminizing* practices. These practices are different for each social class. They argue that schools create a hierarchy of different kinds of masculinity and femininity. Rather than reproduce sex stereotypes, they establish *sets of relations* between male and female pupils which will differ by social class. Private schools, therefore, are likely to set up a different set of relations between male and female pupils than state schools. Okeley's (1978) analysis of her own educational experiences in a private English boarding school reinforces this view. What these schools reproduced, through their particular work in creating “ladies” and “gentlemen,” was the sexual division of the bourgeoisie. When we talk about different types of school, however, we have to remember that the reproduction of *female class relations* through education takes a different shape from that of boys. For boys the reproduction of social differences, particularly in Britain, is often described as a matter of the division between private and state schools. The type of school attended is often as good an indicator of social-class origins as father's occupation (since only the privileged minority of boys from professional and managerial classes, along with the sons of landed aristocracy and capitalists can afford to attend private schools). These boys will go on to take advantage of the entry that such schools offer into higher education, the high-status professions, the government, and more



recently industry. The dominance of those educated privately in positions of economic and political power has, of course, been a major political issue since the Second World War.

The development of private education for girls has had a very different pattern, especially marked by its shorter history. The division between private and state schools has been differently constituted for boys and for girls. Class differences were weaker for girls for a variety of reasons. According to the Public Schools Commission (1968), the founders of private girls' schools fought for state education for *all* girls. Their political ambitions stretched across the class divide in their search for equality of opportunity for all girls and the freedom of all women to enter the professions of law, medicine, teaching, and public service. Secondly, female teachers in private schools moved freely between different types of schools; they did not accept the view that private and state schools were mutually exclusive sectors. The Association of Headmistresses, unlike that of Headmasters, represented all girls' schools whether private or state, and drew girls in from all different social origins (especially because of the lower fees). As a result, the Public Schools Commission concluded:

These schools are not as divisive as the boys' schools. Their pupils are few in number and they do not later wear an old school tie—literally or metaphorically. The tie would be of no use to them in their future careers. No magic doors to careers are opened at the mention of any school's name, however socially distinguished the school may be. The academically distinguished schools obviously help their pupils to a place in the universities but so do those in the maintained or direct grant sectors. (p. 67)

*Educational* privilege was not, therefore, a class privilege of daughters of the bourgeoisie, compared with the men of that social class. The low-level education which girls often received in both private and state schools made them uncompetitive in the labor market. The small proportion who went into higher education was a problem faced by all girls' schools, or by all schools with girls in them (Public Schools Commission, p. 69).

Despite the fact that the division between state and private schools is not a major discriminator between girls of different social classes when their occupational destinies are taken into account, the type of education offered to middle-class girls does differ greatly from that offered to working-class girls. In fact the class gap between girls has been found to be *greater* than between boys, when university entrance is taken into account. According to King (1971), "middle class boys are the most advantaged and working class girls the most disadvantaged, the former having 21 times more chance of taking a full-time university degree than the other" (p. 140). Westergaard and Little (1965) pointed out that the



failure of working-class girls to reach higher education is due to the fact that the resources (cultural, economic and psychological) necessary for a working-class child to overcome the obstacles on the way are very rarely extended on behalf of a girl (p. 222).

This brief history suggests that the reproduction of female class positions in Britain is based more firmly upon the transmission of cultural values (such as familism) than upon the vocational preparation of women for a stratified work force. The transmission of bourgeois conceptions of femininity and their dilution for girls in the working classes may even be a more effective means of differentiating girls than the ideology of vocationalism for boys, since such processes of class discrimination act so well hidden.

### *Gender and School Experience*

According to Connell and his colleagues, class and gender relations are best thought of as *structuring processes* rather than "systems." As such, they are to be found within the dynamics of family, school, and industrial life simultaneously, even if their effects differ in the different spheres. Class and gender relations have their own histories which may merge or may be independent of each other. What is important for the child is the *relationship between such processes*. For the working-class boy, for example, the construction of his masculinity would be in the context either of economic insecurity or "hard won and cherished security":

It means that his father's masculinity and authority is diminished by being at the bottom of the heap in his workplace, and being exploited without being able to control it; and that his mother has to handle the tensions, and sometimes the violence, that result. It means that his own entry into work and the class relations of production is conditioned by the gender relations that direct him to male jobs, and construct for him an imagined future as breadwinner for a new family. And so on. (p. 181)

In this extract one can see how the simplified versions of the transition from school to work have been changed by a sensitivity to not just the presence of gender relations but also the role of family life in determining the shape of an individual's identity and occupational choice.

When discussing pupils' experience of schools, Connell et al. talk about the *hegemonizing* influences of the school in a way which has much in common with the notions of male hegemony and the dominant gender code which I discussed in an earlier paper (Arnot, 1982). In that paper I used the concept of gender code to refer to the social organization of family and school life where the attempt is made to "win over" each new generation to particular definitions of masculinity and femininity



and to accept as natural the hierarchy of male over female. This attempt to win the consent of boys and girls to particular definitions of gender is limited by the strategies and responses adopted by pupils to the social and ideological structures of school life. Often pupils collectively will develop their own culture, creatively and actively transforming the very material of school and family life, and reshaping their meaning in ways that have more relevance and interest for them. These youth cultures may not in themselves challenge the structuring processes of gender and class relations but they do make the outcome of schooling unpredictable.

Empirical research on these youth cultures unfortunately rarely investigates the meaning masculinity has for boys. Willis's work on working-class lads stands out in this respect and reveals, furthermore, not just the essential nature of masculine identity for manual workers but also the sexism involved in that construct. Their anti-school culture is based on the celebration of sexuality—in this case an aggressive, physical machismo—which gives working-class boys a weapon to fight a class-determined education. Far more work is needed, however, before we can say we understand the ways in which class and gender relations relate together for boys from different social classes.

Thomas' work (1980) is a particularly interesting study since it is a comparison between working-class and middle-class girls. Middle-class girls, she found, developed an *anti-academic* counter-culture in which they celebrated a femininity which was based upon notions of beauty, fashion, and the requirements of female glamour occupations such as top secretary and receptionist. By individually negotiating the school's approval of traditional notions of femininity and their encouragement of girls to find jobs for themselves, these girls worked their school lives into line with their interests, asking for special courses in secretarial work, deportment, fashion, and the like. They exaggerated the importance of prettiness, docility, and poise. In contrast, working-class girls responded collectively rather than individually to the pressures of the school and developed an *anti-school* counter-culture. These girls stressed female sexuality to the extent that they were quickly labeled as sexually deviant. They stressed the value not of glamour jobs but of love, romance, and motherhood. What such working-class girls resisted was not just the imposition of certain notions of femininity in the school but also the set of class relations which left them with very dismal occupational futures. Thomas (whose findings paralleled those of McRobbie, 1968, in her study of British working-class girls) concluded that:

While they may share ultimately domestic occupational destinies, and may have their personal identities similarly moulded by a common 'culture of femininity' girls from different social class backgrounds nevertheless experience appreciably different social, material and cultural conditions which



mediate their lives and are reflected in differential class responses to notions of femininity, romance, domesticity and motherhood. In their response to school and work, too, girls draw on the specific values and traditions of their 'parent' class cultures, and these values are mirrored in their differential rates of participation and achievement in the formal educational system. (p. 136)

### *Conclusions: Reintegrating Family and Work*

Developing a political economy of education which takes the family seriously will not just mean that researchers should interview more parents, or should ask pupils how they feel about their parents as well as about their teachers. What it means above all is that we have to recognize the specificity of the family "site" of class and gender relations and see it as the "location" of individuals while *at school*. Such a location, like that of the school, is not static but is a complex ensemble of practices and relationships. If we want to talk about the "lived experience" of family life, therefore, we must understand the nature of the power relations involved in the family, class culture *in the making*, and the forms of negotiation over gender identity. In the home, just as in classrooms, notions of good behavior and rules of conduct are negotiated by the participants. Each set of social relations is important, but as Connell and his colleagues argue, so too is the *relationship between these sets of social relations*. The family and the school are interwoven spheres of activity simultaneously responding to each other. What is critical for the individual child is how to maintain a relationship between the two spheres on a day-to-day basis. Coping with the formal and informal relations between school personnel and parents, how parents remember their own educational histories and how pupils then carry "the burden" of parental aspirations or feeling of failure, how teachers make assumptions about different types of families and how they respond to parental involvement. The child from this perspective, is the *mediator*, the *go-between*, carrying the class-cultural messages of the home and the school through the school gates each day, influencing each in turn by his or her own practices and responses. In contrast with the relations between school and work, there is no transition from the family to the school; there is only perpetual motion. It is this motion that needs to be captured in the accounts of schooling under capitalism.

From a feminist perspective what is obviously of major concern is the contradictions and the dilemmas faced by boys and girls in trying to sort out gender messages. The researcher should ask, for example, how an adolescent girl makes sense of her experiences of sexual harassment by boys in the playground and classroom in relation to her experience as a protected daughter in the family home. Alternatively, how does she



reconcile the demand that she take adult responsibility for certain domestic arrangements with being a school "child" who is forbidden the use of such adult symbols of femininity as jewelry, fashionable clothes, and make-up? How does a boy cope with being beaten academically by a girl at school and yet told by teachers and parents that he will eventually be held responsible for the family income and a dependent and subordinate wife? Such realities may seem trivial but they are the stuff that school and family life is made of. The tension for girls and boys is not how to "obtain" or "acquire" abstract notions of gender but how to use particular concepts of femininity and masculinity which work *in practice* in the context of social class membership. The cultures of different social classes, manifested in different types of family life, offer only certain choices and restrict the possibilities in certain directions for the expression of gender. This does not mean that each individual of the same social class will have an identical notion of what it is to be masculine and feminine but that all members of the same social class are more likely (than any member of another social class) to be confronted with similar situations to respond to.

The experience of family life with all its contradictions and complexity is one of experiencing sets of power relations (e.g. between men and women, parents and children, male and female siblings). That experience will be manifested in a set of *gendered practices*; i.e., *the forms of expression* of particular sets of social relations. Such gendered practices will be adapted, modified and "translated" ("recontextualised") in the setting of school corridors and classrooms. As Anyon (1983) has argued, such practices will involve a complex web of private and public forms of accommodation and resistance. The challenge for sociologists is to unravel the web, uncovering the class specificity and identifying the gendered practices.

Finally, a revised political economy of education needs to reformulate the issue of a pupil's destination after schooling. The current extent of youth unemployment has obviously meant that any simple theory of the transition from school to waged work is no longer viable, but even today we can find research on youth unemployment which does not investigate the issue as one affecting the conditions of family life or gender relations. Unemployed school leavers mostly remain living at home, with increased financial dependence upon the parents rather than the state. This has meant extra work and financial worry for the parents, more domestic work for the female members of the household, and different sets of relationships between members of the family. In the case of girls the issue of unemployment after school is a very different political issue from that of boys' unemployment. As I have argued in the paper, girls have been assumed to be "destined," if not actively prepared by



schools and families, for eventual marriage and motherhood. The experience of female unemployment, therefore, is not treated as such a serious problem as the unemployment of male school leavers who are expecting to find waged work in order to fulfill themselves. The dichotomy of family and work and its ideological underpinning in concepts of gender difference has not yet been shifted in the rhetoric of either state educational planners or radical sociologists. What is needed is to see in what ways families and schools construct a particular relationship between future work and family life and how this relationship is mediated by youth today. The reality of unemployment facing school leavers, the changing shape of family life, the pressure by women to enter waged work and male jobs—all these influence the expected relationship between domestic and waged work. What must now enter the radical discourse is a concern to assess the impact of these changes upon girls' and boys' schooling and self-perceptions. It is only by reintegrating the family and the waged labor process in our analyses of schooling that we can hope to provide an adequate and a radical critique of current class and gender relations in education.

If the family is analyzed in these ways by critical sociologists, then the potential is there for an integration of feminist and political economy perspectives. An awareness among feminists studying education of the need to provide a materialist analysis of gender relations will be complemented by a concern among left sociologists to involve themselves in issues which directly affect women and which grow out of the family-school-work relations. For example, the concern for the age of entry of children into state schools, the concern for after-school-hours daycare, school meals service, school transport, the role of the social services in treating children from "broken" homes and single-parent families, the treatment of school absenteeism—these are all matters which affect women especially. In my view they are matters which can no longer remain outside the mainstream of radical discourse and practice.

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## A Cloud over Co-Education: An Analysis of the Forms of Transmission of Class and Gender Relations

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In 1948 John Newsom,<sup>1</sup> then a school inspector, in his book *The Education of Girls* expounded the view that girls' education should reflect the fact that,

Women possess certain particular needs based on their particular psychology, physiology and their social and economic position.... The fundamental common experience is the fact that the vast majority of them will become the makers of homes, and that to do this successfully requires the proper development of many talents.<sup>2</sup>

Girls, according to Newsom, constituted a single and more or less homogeneous group since they shared a common interest and a main vocation in domesticity. The ideals of education should therefore reflect this future destination of women and stress the *complementarity yet differences* between the sexes. Schooling for girls and boys should be, in the rhetoric of the 1940s, 'equal but different', and should stress the development of individual talents and interests. As Bland, McCabe and Mort have pointed out, Newsom's book provided an early example of the attempt to overcome the contradiction between an ideology of child-centred education with its progressive ideals of individual development and the assumption that all girls were destined to a collective and identical future as 'homemakers'.<sup>3</sup> Yet the book is also an interesting example of yet another problem which has faced educationalists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In his book, Newsom reaches a point where, having demarcated the necessary division between the sexes, he has to recommend a school structure which would fulfil the conditions for the reproduction of such a sexual division of labour. He asks the question: should boys and girls in the heterogeneity be educated together, or should they be separated during school life? He concludes:

As far as the children are concerned there is no satisfactory evidence from which to deduce whether co-education is more generally suitable than segregation. It is a matter of opinion rather than exact knowledge. True it is rarely contended that children of primary age should be separated according to sex, but at the secondary stage there is no generally accepted theory on the subject. If there are enough boys and girls to establish separate schools, then that course is followed; if there are not sufficient for proper organization then a mixed school is provided. In certain circles, however, a cloud 'no bigger than a man's hand' [sic] is forming, a cloud whose contention is that between twelve and fifteen boys and girls are better apart. Puberty comes earlier to girls and they are already 'interested in boys' when boys are still going through the last happy period of barbarism when they regard girls as a nuisance if not with



positive distaste. Once the change from childhood to physical maturity is accomplished, it is held that they can be brought together again with profit. I do not know how far this theory is supported but it presents a fascinating field for detailed research. . . . If there were any possibility of the main contention of this book becoming operative, that of planning of girls' education according to their needs instead of slavishly copying the education of their brothers, there would be an additional reason for temporary segregation. It is all very difficult.<sup>4</sup>

In this chapter I shall show that there is just as much confusion today and just as little research on this issue as in the 1940s. It is still 'all very difficult'. Newsom's indecision about the merits of co-education is representative of the general indecision of policy-makers. For example, in 1945 the Ministry of Education's pamphlet *The Nation's Schools* could not recommend a fixed doctrine as to the provision of mixed or single-sex schools.<sup>5</sup> As it was desirable and advantageous for boys and girls to learn 'to know and respect each other's point of view', co-education was desirable within primary education. But in the area of secondary education, there were the rival advantages of single-sex schools. Since it was already agreed that at adolescence boys and girls *should* be separated for physical training and major games and that at this age their needs and interests ran further apart, single-sex schooling appeared to be the most logical structure. At the level of further education, the mixing of the sexes was again desirable. Therefore, the recommended form of reproduction of the division of the sexes through education was to vary according to the different *age* of the pupils and the different types of schooling offered in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors. One might explain this by noticing that in the primary schools the gender divisions to be reproduced were those found within the domestic sphere where brothers and sisters mix together freely; whilst in the secondary schools the preparation was for the sexual division of labour found within paid employment and a gender-divided labour market. By the time students reached further education, they could be safely brought together since the patterns of gender differentiation would be largely settled.

The debate over the relative merits of each type of school has a long and forgotten history, forgotten perhaps because it is an issue that appears only to concern women. This is especially the case today since it is only feminists and those agencies concerned with the equality of the sexes which have become involved in the discussions as to the advantages and disadvantages of each form of schooling. The traditional and the socialist histories of education have marginalized women's educational experiences and have assumed that the discussion of female education is something which can occur without reference to, or influence upon, male or class histories of education. Thus the issue of what Weinberg<sup>6</sup> called the 'sex structure' of schools is an absent or well-hidden aspect of these accounts. However, if we are not to treat gender categories as natural organizing principles of educational research and gender relations as only referring to female education, then we have to investigate the sets of gender relations made available, through a class determined educational system, to *both* men and women. Thus what I would like to show in this chapter is that the issue of whether to support single-sex or co-educational schools is broader than the current feminist concern of attempting to help girls study science subjects, to help them compete as equals with boys, or to help girls enter university and male occupations. It is an issue which involves analyzing the



differences between class-based notions of education in the state and private sector and the reproduction of the socio-sexual division of labour under capitalism.

I shall trace the outlines of what I have called the 'hidden' history of co-education, in the context of a pattern of educational policy-making which assumed that boys' and girls' education should be different. In a patriarchal society, such a pattern of policy-making was hardly surprising. However, it also led to various problems in the nineteenth century and in this century since it posed the question: how does one place two different types of education (one for each sex) within *one* state system of education? Secondly, how does one locate female class differences in an educational system designed to reproduce the seemingly more important set of class relations — those of men and male occupational hierarchies? The solutions to such policy dilemmas were to utilize the ideology of *female domesticity*, as female historians have shown.<sup>7</sup> Where the two processes of class and gender reproduction collude historically is in the attempted imposition through schooling of a bourgeois family form that entailed the social construction of the female housekeeping wife dependent upon a wage- or salary-earning husband. Secondly, it involved the development of the *myth of female classlessness* which blurred or covered over the differences of educational provision for girls of different social classes.<sup>8</sup>

The dual impact of these two ideological aspects of the processes of reproducing dominant class and gender relations led not to a single educational structure but to a variety of school structures. The history of schooling reveals the range of alternative 'sex structures' available at any one time, as well as the class factors involved in their provision. Thus whilst one might want to talk about a dominant *gender code* in education,<sup>9</sup> reproducing dominant bourgeois gender relations, one must also be aware that in different historical periods and for different social classes there may be a variety of *modalities of transmission* of those gender relations.

In the context of the English state system of education, the most influential modality of transmission of class and gender relations has been that exemplified by the private single-sex grammar school. However by the late 1960s the two systems of education had diverged significantly, with the majority of state comprehensive schools offering co-education, and the majority of private secondary schools retaining their single-sex status. I shall argue that the development of such co-educational comprehensive schools did not represent, despite its progressive image, a challenge to the reproduction of dominant gender relations but rather a modification of the *form* of its transmission. In the second part of the chapter, therefore, I look at the critiques and defence of co-education and the ways in which class factors have become submerged in the debate over the merits or disadvantages of mixed schooling. It is no surprise to me, for instance, given the history of co-education, that as Jenny Shaw points out the paradox of the British model of mixed comprehensive secondary school is that 'by its own criteria of success its most promising pupils persistently underachieve'.<sup>10</sup> 'How is it', she asks, 'that girls, who begin their school career with what appears to be a flying start over boys, being as much as two years ahead in reading and in physical and psychological maturity, come to leave school with far fewer qualifications?'<sup>11</sup> The suggestion here is that such schools do not offer equality of opportunity to boys and girls alike, but rather that they actually close the door or 'harm' girls<sup>12</sup> by their detrimental effects.

Co-educational comprehensives historically were meant to reproduce life within a 'normal' bisexual world, and it is the reproduction of this world that feminists have responded to. In the final part of the chapter I look very briefly at



the various responses of feminists to the nature of such an educational goal. I look at the critiques they offer to mixed schooling and the implications of each perspective in terms of how far they may realistically expect to break down gender inequality by the educational reforms they suggest.

### The Hidden History of Co-Education

It is generally assumed that co-educational schools only became an issue in the 1970s especially after the report of the Department of Education and Science on *Curricular Differences for Boys and Girls* found that girls were more likely to achieve a broader education and make less sex-stereotyped decisions of subject choice in single-sex schools than in mixed ones.<sup>13</sup> Certainly that report can be seen as the contemporary catalyst to much more interest being taken in the advantages and disadvantages of mixed schools. However, the relative merits of this form of schooling had been challenged as early as the 1920s when women teachers realized that mixed schools might well involve a reduction of their promotion prospects, especially since most mixed schools had a male head, and female teachers were generally limited to teaching infants, girls and specialist domestic-type classes.<sup>14</sup> As it is impossible to trace the intricacies of this history of co-educational schools without more research and more space, I will therefore confine myself here to the broadest of patterns which appear to be significant.

The development of co-educational schools had been patchy in the nineteenth century, and to a large extent was determined by the social class clientele of the pupils.<sup>15</sup> The increasing provision of girls' private schools, both day schools and boarding schools, repeated in many ways the style and ethos of boys' schools. They attempted to emulate their academic norms as well as provide for the distinctive requirements of middle-class and aristocratic girls. In 1864 the Taunton Commission recommended that the proper development of middle-class girls' character was provided by the establishment of girls' day schools, even though a Mr Hammond who gave evidence to them reported that he had found no noticeable difference of attainment in the two sexes when taught in mixed schools. During the nineteenth century several notable girls-only public schools were set up, modelled upon the boys' public boarding schools; for example, St. Leonards, St. Andrews (1877), Roedean (1885), Godolphin School (1886), Wycombe Abbey (1896) and Sherborne (1899).<sup>16</sup> These schools restricted their entry to girls of specific social class (through the procedures of social selection and the setting of high fees) to a greater extent than the girls' day-schools under the aegis of the Girls' Public Day Schools Company. The main pattern of education of the bourgeoisie was therefore largely that of single-sex education which entailed a segregation of the sexes based upon a differentiation of the roles of men and women of that social strata.

Certainly, at one level, it was convenient to establish single-sex girls' schools since the boys' schools were already so well-developed. On the other hand, single-sex schooling more easily catered for the reproduction of the bourgeois gender relations in which, as Judith Okeley argues,<sup>17</sup> girls were prepared more for the marriage market than the labour market.

... girls are protected for a future marriage contract within an elite whose biological and social reproduction they ensure. They have no economic and political power independent of males such as their fathers, and later their husbands and sons.<sup>18</sup>



Thus the advantages of attending a public school for girls are not found in the economic advantages of access to the high status professions, nor indeed necessarily access to universities. Rather, they lie in the acquisition of the cultural capital of that social class and of maintaining the possibility of marrying into it, through the social network the schools give access to. Thus as Okeley writes, in this social strata:

... boys' and girls' educations are not symmetrical but they are *ideologically interdependent*. That considered female is partly defined by its opposite: that which is considered to be male. The characteristics of one institution are strengthened by their absence in the other. Qualities primarily reserved for one gender will have a different meaning in the institution of the opposing gender. The two educations are also linked in practice since, in adulthood, individuals from the separate institutions will be united in marriage for the consolidation of their class. As members of the same social class the girls and boys may share similar educational experiences but as members of different gender categories some of their educational experiences may differ.<sup>19</sup> (my emphasis)

What single-sex schools offered to the bourgeoisie was the chance to provide *different but equally privileged* educations for its sons and daughters, maintaining the appropriateness of a rigid sexual division of labour between public and private worlds, between male paid employment and female family responsibilities. Further, single-sex schools by their physical segregation of the sexes provided the conditions for the maintenance of female adolescent virginity and the preservation of the concept of bourgeois marriage. The reproduction of heterosexuality as the norm of sexual relations ironically required the setting up of single-sex environments, which always contained the dangers of sponsoring homosexual relations amongst staff and pupils. Yet while homosexuality amongst boys in particular was a well known occurrence in boys' public schools, it did not appear to threaten the stability of the bourgeois family form, in a way that mixing of the sexes at adolescence might have implied. As Turner argues, 'the reason why the middle class insisted on a social and educational barrier between boys and girls was because they feared that sexual misbehaviour was an inevitable consequence of co-education'.<sup>20</sup> Thus while the dominant form of transmission of the sexual division of labour amongst the bourgeoisie — single-sex schools — allowed for the reproduction of class cultural unity, it also provided for the reproduction of intra-class gender differentiation which maintained the notion of the bourgeois family form of salary-earning husband, and a dependent housekeeping wife who would provide the only legitimate heirs to the economic and cultural wealth of that social class.<sup>21</sup> However, the development of co-educational schools was beginning to be officially encouraged for the middle classes; for example, the Bryce Commission in 1895 took the view that there were too few endowed and proprietary schools which were mixed. The commission used the experience of the United States where co-education had been flourishing to argue that:

this system has been tried with so much success in other countries, and to some extent in Great Britain itself, that we feel sure its use may be extended without fear of any undersirable consequences, and probably with some special advantages for the formation of character and general stimulus to intellectual activity.<sup>22</sup>



By 1898 the most famous co-educational boarding school, Bedales, had opened its door to girls. However the popularity of single-sex schools in the private fee-paying sector was to hold its own well into the latter part of the twentieth century. By 1968 the Public Schools Commission found that out of 273 public schools in England and Wales there were only three mixed public schools, accounting for 1162 out of 105,000 pupils.<sup>23</sup> In the maintained sector, in contrast 58 per cent of secondary schools were co-educational, catering for 60 per cent of secondary pupils. The commission felt that the high number of single-sex private schools were more a reflection of the 'intentions of their founders and the conventions of their day' than the current parental attitudes in the late 1960s. They suggested that

many parents would welcome co-education either for its own sake or so that brothers and sisters may attend the same school where this would be more convenient than attending separate schools.<sup>24</sup>

The objection to co-education they saw as linked to boarding education and the fear of sexual relationships developing between male and female pupils. Such fear they felt to be exaggerated and argued instead that if girls were to have equal opportunities with boys, they could only receive these through co-educational schools.

Today there are many more mixed private secondary schools. Some boys' schools have brought girls into all 'forms' and other have let girls into the sixth form only.<sup>25</sup> However, as a recent report in *The Sunday Times* showed,<sup>26</sup> the introduction of mixing in these schools has not threatened the reproduction of gender relations at either the academic or sexual level. Girls are being recruited either to take the arts subjects which boys do not choose to study particularly at advanced levels, or to provide entertainment for boys who also might be distracted from their homosexual activities. Interestingly the penalty for a boy and girl found in bed together is expulsion whilst a lenient view tends to be taken of homosexual activities in such schools. As *The Sunday Times* reporter commented:

This puts the schools in the curious position of turning a blind eye to an illegal activity (homosexual relations between persons under 21) while maintaining severe sanctions against a perfectly legal one (heterosexual relations between persons over 16).<sup>27</sup>

Male teachers also felt the advantages of the presence of girls in such mixed public schools. One, for example, claimed that the major benefit of introducing girls into previously boys-only private schools was a 'rediscovery of a relaxed normality'. Unfortunately the nature of this 'normality' can be seen in the following statement of another teacher:

'I couldn't face going back to the intensity of a single sex school. I'd rather leave teaching. Did you notice this morning? I went into the classroom and the girls saw straight away that I'd had a haircut and they commented on it. They'll mention your tie as well. It keeps you on your toes: in the old days masters wore the same ties for the whole term.'<sup>28</sup>

The dominant form of reproduction of bourgeois gender relations (until recently when it has been modified) has been that of single-sex schools which were



based upon the principle of children's exclusion and protection from contact with other social classes and from contact with the opposite sex. Education was meant to train boys for their future roles as leaders of the country and as patriarchs, and to train girls for their future roles as wives and mothers of the members of that social class. In this way single-sex schools made possible a division of labour which gave both boys and girls of that social class privileges, as well as ensuring the reproduction of the gender hierarchy specific to that social class. In this context a specifically bourgeois notion of femininity was transmitted to the girls that differed from those aspects of femininity taught within state secondary schools. Whilst to the outsider, the concepts of femininity in the private and state sector schools may appear to be very similar, as Lucy Blandford found, ex-public school girls in 1977 were acutely sensitive to the signs of class difference between themselves and girls from state grammar schools. These differences can be seen in the following extracts from Blandford's interviews:

At ten a public school girl has already learned how to handle servants: that particular distance that the upper classes keep from inferiors and each other, is imbibed early. At school a girl soon learns that one doesn't talk to the kitchen staff: in the hols she learns how much to tip staff and how to do it unselfconsciously when she goes away (and these days, how not to register surprise if there's no staff to tip, times being what they are). As one grander type puts it 'You can always tell a grammar school girl who has married well by the fact that she's a fraction too familiar with her servants and rather uncomfortable with yours.'<sup>29</sup>

Can a state-school girl pass herself off as The Real Thing? There's a moment of embarrassed surprise. 'When she's young', says Sal ... 'any pretty woman with a good figure can dress herself up and pass herself off as anything. But when she gets older, she inevitably reverts to type'. Nicki describes a well-turned-out, well-educated and ambitious state-school girl as a 'cultured pearl, not a real pearl'.<sup>30</sup>

In contrast to this history, many co-educational schools were available to the children of the working classes by the mid-nineteenth century. The early charity schools set up by the bourgeoisie to educate poor children in the 'rudiments' of education and to provide a training in 'morals and good conduct' were often mixed. June Purvis has documented the variety of forms of educational provision available to working-class girls from 1800 to 1870, noticing that a large number of National Society schools were mixed.<sup>31</sup> The evidence she collected suggested that girls attained a higher academic standard in the 3Rs especially in arithmetic when in mixed schools and taught by male teachers. Problems arose if girls were in mixed schools with infants since female pupils might be asked to help care for and teach the younger children as unpaid helpers. In 1858 the Newcastle Commission reported that of the 1895 schools they inspected nearly half were mixed, of which 10 per cent were mixed infant schools. Only 18.1 per cent were girls' schools and 22.2 per cent were boys' schools.<sup>32</sup> With the passing of the 1870 Education Act, a state system of national elementary schools became established, bringing together, as Purvis has pointed out, not just the fragmented system of educational provision but also the principles of class and gender differentiation and controls which had characterized the voluntary schools run by the bourgeoisie for the working classes. This Act did not attempt to establish the principle of equal education for all social classes; nor did it attempt to establish an equal education for boys and girls.



For working class girls . . . the provision of a state system of national education meant a renewed emphasis on education for motherhood rather than education for employment, a renewed emphasis that was especially pronounced in the latter decades of the century when grants were made for the teaching of cookery and laundry work. But not all working class girls experienced such a state system since school attendance was not made compulsory until 1880 and not made free until 1891.<sup>33</sup>

Thus despite the fact that many elementary schools were co-educational, (about half in 1900) gender differentiation in the working classes was not seriously challenged. As Purvis' research shows, whatever the form of schooling it was always assumed that the female sex should be prepared for the private sphere of the home, while boys would be prepared primarily for activities outside the home, in paid employment. Separate schools, separate departments or separate classes were established for boys and girls and in each type of school *gender-specific curricula* were taught. Therefore, a range of alternative school sex-structures was offered to the working classes; the choice being affected to a certain extent by the regional catchment area since single-sex schools were more likely to flourish in towns, while mixed schools were needed in the scattered populations of rural areas. However, it is important that behind the pragmatics of policy decisions, there was little identification of the concept of gender *mixing* with that of *identity of training* for boys and girls. Co-educational schools generally meant that the different educations for boys and girls were 'mixed together' rather than integrated into a common form of schooling.

Sex-segregation could involve the physical separation of boys and girls through total exclusion in boarding schools such as those provided by and for the middle classes, or it could involve the separation of day schools by sex, or it could involve the separation of teaching classes and subjects for boys and girls *within* one building. For example, the 1903 Code set up, according to David,<sup>34</sup> separate 'classes' in different school subjects. The basis was set for the unity and diversity of male and female working-class education within one type of school. The production of class identity was provided through the common courses that boys and girls took as a 'preparation for adult life', which was generally referred to by the 'neutral' concept of 'citizenship'. In the higher elementary schools these were English language and literature, elementary maths, history and geography. Separate courses, on the other hand, could then reproduce the sexual division of labour. Boys were trained for their futures not just as manual workers through such vocational courses as technical drawing and woodwork but also for their role as future fathers, that is, wage earners and heads of households. Girls were prepared for their future roles as economically dependent mothers and domestics within the working class.

The growth of secondary schools involved the financial necessity of producing larger schools. This led, according to David, to more mixed secondary grammar schools, where women teachers tended to be excluded from headships and the teaching of male adolescents. Not surprisingly many women teachers were in favour of single-sex schools and a differentiation of curricula for boys and girls, since it was in this sort of educational provision that they stood any chance of promotion, a career, responsibilities and control over education. The numbers of mixed secondary schools, however, were still small.

By 1919 only 224 out of 1080 secondary schools recognized as efficient were



co-educational.<sup>35</sup> The motto 'education for one's station in life' involved class and gendered concepts of adult destiny that did not easily lead to co-education as a progressive ideal, but rather accepted it as a pragmatic necessity in certain circumstances. Put another way, the protection that upper-middle-class girls had from contact with the male sex was a possible sacrifice in the development of a sparsely funded state educational system. The compromise was to make sure that the sexes did not mix physically in any sports and to provide a range of separate classes for boys and girls within secondary schools. In the development of secondary education, what we can find is a diluted and modified version of the reproduction of bourgeois gender relations for those who could not afford the full cost of private education.

Concern over co-education was shown in the Report of the Consultative Committee of the Board of Education on the *Differentiation of the Curriculum for Boys and Girls Respectively in Secondary Schools* in 1923.<sup>36</sup> This report did not see the issue of co-education as part of its brief; nevertheless, in an appendix it collected the views of its witnesses upon this topic. Significantly, criticism of co-educational schools came largely from women witnesses. They argued that mixed schools were in fact boys' schools with girls in them, that women teachers and girls had no chance to get involved in the running of the school, that girls were shy in the presence of boys and that girls in girls' schools reached a higher standard than in co-educational schools. Sexual attachments were also a problem between male teachers and female pupils. (All these criticisms, interestingly, are the same as those made of mixed schools today.)

Whilst the issue was not resolved in this Report, what was evident was the tension between a desire to maintain the internal *unity* of class experience as well as the *diversity* of different sexes and different social classes. Were the sons and daughters of the working class to receive broadly similar educational experiences or would boys receive an education in common with boys of another social class, and working-class girls with their counterparts in the bourgeoisie? This tension and its resolution is still a matter of contention. Socialist historians emphasize the collective 'lived experience' of the working class in contrast with that of the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, feminists have stressed the differences between boys' and girls' schooling. While identifying class differences, they have, nevertheless, talked of a *domestic ideology* which, within a patriarchal context, has displaced class differences and *united* the subordination of daughters of the bourgeoisie and working classes. The impact of an educational ideology which is *familial* in orientation and domestic in practice (across the divide of state and private education) is supposed to have reduced the effect of class divisions amongst women to the extent that gender is primary.

My own view is that the *ideology of femininity, of family and domesticity has hidden the female class divisions within education.*<sup>37</sup> Whilst vocational ideology, that is, an education for different occupational statuses reveals, in far more explicit form, *male* class differentiation within state schooling, domestic ideology has more successfully involved a 'misrecognition' of the action of state and class power. In this sense, one reading the history of female education could assume that women were untouched by the class nature of society, except insofar as they married into different social classes. There is a danger that in focussing too exclusively upon gender divisions, apart from the class history of education, the *myth of female classlessness* will be perpetuated. This myth is one found in state policy. As a result, within government reports, one can find the variety of ideological solutions found



to the problem of positioning a specifically 'female' education within the *structure of male class relations* within education, especially within those dealing with the tripartite division of secondary schools. The underlying ideological premise was that schools should prepare boys in different ways for their future places within the occupational hierarchy; meanwhile girls of different social classes were being prepared in different ways in different types of school for that other hierarchy — the sexual hierarchy of family life. Thus working-class girls received a diet of cookery, sewing and domestic science courses and middle-class grammar school girls learnt the range of languages, literature, history and artistic accomplishments necessary for a future marital life.

The new rhetoric of 'social engineering' by the 1970s changed the focus of girls' education somewhat since it recognized that girls were indeed likely to go into paid employment especially when single. The co-educational comprehensive school in many ways represented a new solution to the problem of class and gender inequalities in society, in that it placed all pupils in one school and theoretically encouraged children to follow courses according to their own 'interests and needs'. Pupil freedom of choice now seemed to be the way to alleviate class and gender inequalities. In this context co-educational schools acquired a new 'progressive' image which was not really challenged until the 1970s.

Historically, as we have seen, at no point and in no social class were boys and girls offered a *common curriculum* since the premise of educational policy-makers and schools was that girls should receive a different education from boys. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that when the programme of comprehensivisation was developed, encouraging co-educational schools, the assumption of gender differentiation was retained underneath the new ideology of free choice and pupil needs. Instead of explicitly identifying all girls as a homogeneous group with identical needs, the reproduction of gender divisions could be left to the now historically internalized attitudes and gender ideologies of parents, teachers, careers officers, employers and finally the students themselves. In this sense the assumptions of male superiority and female domesticity (being unchallenged) were encouraged, albeit more implicitly, to prevail. The form of reproduction of gender relations became therefore more hidden and less conscious, surrounded as it was by the ideology of ability, 'achievement-motivation' and individual freedom of choice.

### Critiques and Defence of Co-Education

I shall now discuss the contemporary debate over co-education which has many similarities with the views expressed in the 1920s by female witnesses to the Report of the Consultative Committee of the Board of Education.<sup>38</sup> The catalyst for recent discussion of the value of co-education was the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act which attempted to eliminate discrimination on the grounds of sex in areas where women have been prevented from achieving social and economic equality with men, as well as the DES survey on the *Curricular Differences for Boys and Girls* published in the same year.<sup>39</sup> The latter, conducted by the HM Inspectorate on primary, middle and secondary schools, revealed the extent of gender differentiation practised in schools. There was a variety of discriminatory practises based upon the assumption that boys and girls had different interests, abilities and futures. Schools were shown to be structured in such a way that children of different sexes were prepared for different roles in adult life and were encouraged to expect gender differentiation



as normal. The reason given for such differentiation was not academic but that it was 'normal practice' (that is, it was a convenient long-standing organization, or it was financially necessitated). The most important effect of such practices was found in the pattern of boys' and girls' curricula — the subjects they were offered, those they chose to study and those taken by boys and girls for examination. Curricular options were offered differentially for boys and girls, especially in secondary schools. These included physical education, crafts (such as home economics, needlework, woodwork and metalwork) and the more academic subjects such as languages, physics and chemistry. The effect of such differentiation was that girls could be found clustered in the arts subjects, leaving boys in the majority in the 'hard sciences'.

However, the important revelation of this report was that the *provision* of different curricular subjects did not determine *choice*. What appeared to be important in affecting choice of subjects was whether the school was mixed or single-sex. Thus in single-sex schools, girls were more likely to take science subjects and boys were more likely to choose languages and the arts than in mixed schools. The choice of 'academic' subjects was also affected at 'A' levels where 'any correlation between the sex of the pupil and the popularity of a subject is markedly greater in mixed schools than in single sex schools'.<sup>40</sup> The tendency was of single-sex schools to weaken the gender patterns of subject choice, particularly as far as girls and science were concerned. These findings were supported by other pieces of research such as King's study of mathematics teaching in mixed and single sex schools,<sup>41</sup> and Omerod's on subject choice.<sup>42</sup> However, despite this evidence that girls and boys received less stereotyped educations in single-sex schools, the DES survey did not argue that boys and girls *should* be educated separately or together. It argued that '*the findings would be misinterpreted if used to argue the case for either single sex or mixed schools*', and advised a reconsideration of the curricular programmes of 12 to 16-year-olds to ensure that 'the principal areas of the curriculum are open to all boys and girls in whatever kind of school they happen to be'.<sup>43</sup>

The report's hesitancy to recommend single-sex education may have been affected by the other findings which, to a large extent, have been ignored by recent commentators. In almost all single-sex schools there is very little variety for the non-academically oriented pupil. Craft and practical subjects follow very traditional patterns. As Eileen Byrne has pointed out this lack of free access of girls to handicrafts and of boys to homecraft has important vocational effects.<sup>44</sup> Domestic economy has meant that girls are taught cookery and needlework as preparation for the home and not employment, whilst boys are taught handicrafts such as woodwork, metalwork and technical drawing which have more 'transfer value', and more conceptual elements than homecraft.

The technical craft subjects . . . unquestionably have a major educative value in their own right. Regardless of whether boys later became welders or craftsmen, woodwork, metalwork and technical drawing have several foundation and transfer values not characteristic of domestic economy. They reinforce spatial development and numerical concepts, involving mensuration and spatial relationships from the outset — the very areas in which girls are alleged to be innately weaker than boys and in which girls therefore need early reinforcement, not further deprivation. . . . There is a clear causal relationship between girls' exclusion from the technical



crafts and their almost total under-recruitment in the training and employment fields of construction, metal trades, electrical engineering, maintenance engineering.<sup>45</sup>

As Byrne pointed out, the exclusion from these subjects means that girls are most likely to see skilled work in these areas as masculine. The recent concern over the academic advantages of single-sex schools has generally been limited to a concern for girls taking 'O' and 'A' levels and for those who might attend university, rather than enter skilled apprenticeships or further training in the engineering sciences. Yet the extent of gender differences in these craft subjects at CSE can be seen in the statistics. In 1978, for example, only 540 girls passed CSE in metalwork compared with 50,493 boys; and 2126 girls took technical drawing compared with 73,461 boys.<sup>46</sup>

Secondly, the emphasis upon the gender differentiation of academic subjects covers the class bias of the school system, which is hidden within the findings of the report. All girls are treated as identical, as are all boys. The only other factor referred to is that of the type of school, but the main body of the report does not discuss the differences between them. In the appendices the DES report shows that physics was offered to 90–100 per cent of grammar school girls (mixed and single sex) but only 37 per cent of mixed secondary modern and 11 per cent of single-sex secondary modern school girls. While 33 per cent of girls in single-sex grammar schools and 29 per cent of mixed grammar school girls took physics, a paltry 3 and 4 per cent of girls in mixed and single-sex secondary modern schools did. The differences regarding *type of school* attended are critical to subject choice especially in subjects such as physics, chemistry and other high status 'academic' subjects. The greatest advantage of single-sex over mixed schools is in the comprehensive school group, and that difference is only 5 per cent more girls taking physics and 6 per cent more girls taking chemistry. Yet the differences regarding types of schools were not used in the report except as a means of statistically adjusting the data since most of the single-sex schools in the sample were grammar schools.

The differential impact of single-sex schooling on different social classes in different types of schools was investigated by Douglas and Ross using the National Survey of Health and Development data.<sup>47</sup> Here they found that the majority of middle-class children in their sample attended single-sex grammar schools whilst over half the manual working class attended secondary modern mixed schools. The sex-segregated grammar schools had the advantages of having small class sizes, more resources and high school leaving age with more of the pupils coming from middle-class homes than the mixed grammar schools. This applied especially to the boys' schools. Using class origins, type of school and the results of reading and mathematics tests administered at 11 and 15 years, what Douglas and Ross discovered was that middle-class boys, and both boys and girls of the manual working classes stayed on longer and got better 'O' level results if they attended single-sex rather than mixed grammar schools. Middle-class girls, in contrast, were at a considerable advantage at mixed grammar schools, which might be because girls' grammar schools were under-resourced and the curricular options were limited. At grammar school level therefore, the interests of middle-class girls opposed those of working-class girls. In the secondary modern schools again the middle-class girls stayed on longer in mixed schools than in single-sex schools, while for all other pupils there was no difference between co-educational or single-sex schools. Douglas and Ross leave the reader to decide whether the



academic advantages of co-education for middle-class girls outweigh the disadvantages of mixed schools for all boys and working-class girls at grammar school level. Certainly there does seem to be a conflict between the results obtained here and those offered later in the DES survey. Unfortunately Douglas and Ross could not study the impact of comprehensive schools. The growth of co-educational comprehensive schools in contrast to the single-sex grammar school has certainly contributed to what Glennerster called the 'snob value' of single sex schooling,<sup>48</sup> because if anything the single-sex direct grant schools had become even more restricted in social class intake educating a very 'special elite'. The data are totally insufficient to make an adequate assessment of the *academic* or the *class* advantages and disadvantages of co-education and single sex schooling.<sup>49</sup>

Nevertheless, the concern for the academic disadvantages of co-education represents a re-evaluation of the operation of the ideology of equality of opportunity and its application to girls. More than that, it represents a challenge to the major premises of educational planning since the 1960s, especially since the growth of co-educational schools was accelerated by the re-organization of schooling along comprehensive lines. In 1975 some 87 per cent of state comprehensive schools were mixed and in contrast 74 per cent state grammar schools were single-sex. All but 3 of the 174 direct grant schools were single-sex. (In Scotland, by contrast, only 4.8 per cent of all pupils in educational authority secondary schools were in single-sex schools.) By 1978 the pattern of English and Welsh educational provision in the maintained sector was as shown in Table 1.<sup>50</sup>

*Table 1 English and Welsh educational provision in the maintained sector, 1978*

	Boys	Girls	Mixed	Total
Primary	33	31	20,577	20,641
All middle schools	7	7	1,289	1,303
All secondary schools (excluding middle)	472	482	3,156	4,110
Modern	93	95	451	639
Grammar	114	118	73	305
Technical	6	7	6	19
Comprehensive	235	248	2,594	3,077
Other secondary	24	14	32	70

Needless to say, the opposition to the comprehensive ideal was sometimes fought by attacking its co-educational status. For example in the *Bristol Evening Post* in 1964 the concern for sexual promiscuity, so feared by the middle classes, again reared its head.

One London co-education school headmaster considered his figures 'greatly improved' with only 16 pregnancies in a year among his 15 and 16 year old girls. The authorities at a large comprehensive co-educational school were shocked to discover that the babies of a number of girls found to be pregnant were actually conceived on the premises — at break times. Co-education brings sex right into the classroom.<sup>51</sup>

Yet according to Benn and Simon, in their study *Half Way There*,<sup>52</sup> there was no



evidence of increased sexual promiscuity in mixed comprehensive schools. What they did find was a wide range of discriminatory practices restricting the principle of comprehensivisation — the freedom of pupils to choose those subjects that suited their interests. They were particularly concerned to discover the lack of access for girls to engineering subjects such as building, woodwork, navigation, physics with chemistry, surveying, and technology courses. Half of the mixed schools limited some subjects to boys only and 49 per cent limited subjects such as catering, nursing, pottery, hygiene, jewellery making, domestic science and dancing to girls only. The future of effective comprehensivisation in their view, was to *eliminate* such gender differentiation.

Support for genuinely co-educational schools came from a range of sources. The NUT, for example, stated in 1975:

The Union recognises that the origins of separate education for boys and girls lie in the history and evolution of education. Schools traditionally educated boys and girls in ways which were intended to prepare them for quite separate and distinct roles in society as men and women: roles which were so different that the teaching methods and curricula were incompatible. Society has changed radically, however, and the pressures to give full equality to men and women in their work, their places in society and their responsibilities and commitments they face should be reflected in and catered for by the schools. To educate children in groups, segregated on the basis of difference of sex, is to effect an artificial separation which bears little or no relation to life at home or to society in general. . . . A pattern of education based on such separation and founded on concepts of allegedly distinguishable and incompatible needs of boys and girls no longer serves the interests either of society or of children.<sup>53</sup>

Thus while the current academic disadvantages of boys and girls within co-educational comprehensive schools might be recognized, the belief in the *transformative potential* of such schools (with, as Benn and Simon put it, an active attempt to change and improve those schools) was sufficient for some to continue to believe in the principle of mixing, albeit within a society still structured through class and gender inequality.

Yet support for the principle of mixing boys and girls in school came from other rather embarrassing quarters. Dale is famous for his three-volume study of the advantages of mixed and single-sex schools as seen by pupils and ex-pupils who were trainee teachers.<sup>54</sup> He stresses more than anything the social rather than the academic advantages of co-education since mixed schools more effectively reproduce what he calls 'normal life'; boys and girls get to know each other; they are less likely to suffer from the extremes of character defects such as the aggression of boys and the 'cattiness' or 'bitchiness' of girls. Less harsh discipline and more friendly relations exist within the happy family atmosphere of such schools. Overall, he argues, co-education leads to greater happiness since it is a less 'unnatural' or distorted educational experience. As in all such studies, Dale is careful to refer continuously to the 'objectivity' of his research even though a good deal of his analysis rests upon interpretation of interview material. The concern for 'performance' is again the criterion of assessment, except in this case it refers to social behaviour and attitudes.

His interpretation of his research data, as well as the limitations of his sample



and style of inquiry, has been challenged by quite a few.<sup>55</sup> Perhaps the more sceptical response has been that offered by feminists who are aware of the conservative view Dale holds as to the differences between the sexes. In one paper he uses an analogy which he knew would infuriate 'members of the Women's Liberation Movement'.<sup>56</sup> He argues that men and women are biologically different not just in physiology but in temperament. Thus the aggression of men is compared with the 'bull who is master and defender of the herd while the cows peacefully graze and look after their offspring'. He argues:

That men and women are complementary is a biological fact — that they also influence each other's conduct from the gift of flowers to the hurling of the kitchen utensils — is an inevitable accompaniment of life in a bi-sexual world. A family has a father and a mother; lacking one of these each member feels incomplete and unsatisfied, . . . So it is with other institutions when they are one-sex — as we know from the homosexual activities in Public School and armed forces . . . both the father figure and the mother figure are needed in our schools.<sup>57</sup>

For Dale, the advantage of mixed schools can be found precisely in their reproduction of life in a bisexual heterosexual world, in which men dominate and women learn to complement and subordinate themselves to men. With this image of 'normality' in mind, it is hardly surprising that co-educational schools are seen as nowhere near the ideal from a feminist position. The research of Michelle Stanworth, for example, confirms that it is the worst aspects of patriarchal relations which are reproduced within the mixed educational setting.<sup>58</sup> Girls have to cope with *devaluation* by teachers and by boys — teachers who cannot remember their names, who expect them to leave school and become good wives and mothers, or in the short term secretaries and nurses, and boys who see themselves as superior to the girls, who attract most of the teacher's attention, who ridicule the more academic girls and chase after the more amenable.

### 'Feminist' Responses to Co-Education

I shall now look briefly at three different responses to the data and arguments collected so far. The 'feminist' responses have not been unified; they comprise what I see as three strands each of which represents a different political position and a different concept of what education can do to reform or change gender relations. These three strands have the following features in common.

- (1) They seek an educational programme of reform which will lead to the *equality of the sexes*. They argue for the importance of education and its potential to change attitudes and behaviour. However, the nature of the goal differs. For some equality of the sexes means equality of power sharing, for others it means equality in difference, or equality of opportunity. The actual *elimination* of gender as a category in education as an overall goal is not really discussed by any of the three groups, and yet it is the one goal which Eileen Byrne argues (and I would agree with her) will challenge women's subordinate position at a fundamental level.<sup>59</sup>
- (2) All the various perspectives simplify the argument to its most essential features — that of mixed versus single sex schools. This is given legitimacy by the DES statistics which only use these two categories; yet as we have seen historically



there is a wide range of difference in the type of gender differentiation in available forms of secondary schooling. Today we can find schools with boarding provision for both sexes or one sex only; schools with two sexes mixed together in the sixth form only; schools that are paired on one site; or mixed schools in which leisure activities are divided and curricular options are gender differentiated. Rather than discuss the different *levels of degrees* or mixing and sex segregation, what characterizes nearly all the recent articles on this issue is their narrowing down of the discussion to the question: should boys be present or absent in the educational lives of girls? Physical segregation is the main issue rather than an overall assessment of when, where and how boys and girls are and could usefully be brought together or separated. Given the desire to change the sexist attitudes and practices of teachers, male pupils' behaviour and the stereotypical ambitions and self-evaluations of female pupils, the question needs to be asked: would a conscious explicit attack upon segregation, and a real attempt to reform teacher's ideology and practice, be more effective than increased or renewed sex segregation?

(3) There is more a concern to change the form of *female* education than to restructure boys' education in such a way as to 'interrupt' the socialization of boys into prejudiced men. In this sense, co-education versus sex segregation remains a feminist issue without challenging, in the present, the attitudes of men. Gender relations become identified as a *female* rather than a male problem, and one which appears to have had no historical basis within the development of a capitalist and patriarchal society.

### *(1) The liberal reformist perspective*

The emphasis of this perspective (which is currently the most popular)<sup>60</sup> is on the academic failure of girls to achieve in science subjects, to get to universities and to receive a broadly based education. The assumption is that girls lack the motivation, the encouragement and the opportunity to break from the stereotyped notions of femininity and women's occupational futures. The attitudes of teachers, careers advisers, curricular texts and the pupils themselves must be challenged and opened out so that there is no division between female and male subjects, no association of non-femininity with academic success. The problem of girls' failure to enter any other than the most stereotypically female jobs is referred to as an 'educational problem' since if girls would only seize the opportunities offered in comprehensive schools, they could compete as equals with boys and men. Within this perspective is a belief in the individual nature of social mobility, of achievement and ambition. The problem for reformers, therefore, becomes one of breaking the hold of myths about women's role in society, of breaking the circulation of a sex role ideology which is seen as both the *cause* and *effect* of women's inferior position. The solution to such female underachievement is to sponsor single-sex classes in a compensatory fashion, giving girls a chance to develop for themselves their spatial and mathematical abilities, without the competition of boys, and to encourage them to see science and technology as female occupational areas.

Such a perspective offers considerable optimism to teachers and educational planners since it gives practical and 'do-able' advice at the classroom level. Yet there are several difficulties in this viewpoint. The first is obvious: *does the separation of girls from boys actually change patriarchal relations* or does it merely give girls access to the male world of science in which they still might only become



technicians and laboratory assistants? Even if girls were to receive identical qualifications to boys there is no guarantee that they will obtain the same jobs as boys. As Wolpe has pointed out,<sup>61</sup> qualifications do not guarantee occupational entry especially in an occupational world in which male skills are defined as superior to women's and there is resistance from male dominated employers and trade unions.

The idea of compensatory education for girls in single-sex classes has been taken up by the Equal Opportunities Commission, and by ILEA educational officers. Further, it receives support from the various schools which are already trying it out. What is not yet clear is which category of pupil is to be encouraged to attend single-sex classes (that is, 'A', 'O' level or CSE candidates). There also seems to be an assumption that if the pattern of boys' and girls' examination passes, subject choice and entry rates into further training and higher education matched, then equality of the sexes would be achieved. However, the problem here is that such a view ignores the *class inequalities* of education and tends to assume that class oppression should be shared equally. The school is left in a social and political vacuum with none of its history of educational provision that constructed the problem of educational gender differentiation in the first place. Paradoxically the school is expected to challenge the reproduction of gender relations even though it itself was set up precisely to reinforce this. The limits of any compensatory programme need to be recognized at the outset.

## (2) *The Conservative Perspective*

This position is most similar to that which has underpinned educational policy-making since the nineteenth century. Support for single-sex schools was justified, according to this perspective, because of the special role which women have as mothers and wives, which differentiates them from men. The ideology of equality of the sexes in this context has meant that boys' and girls' education should be different but equal. According to Sarah Delamont,<sup>62</sup> in the nineteenth century feminists were divided into two camps — which she called the 'separatists' and the 'uncompromising'. The analogy here is with the separatists who argued for a special education for girls to prepare them for their uniquely feminine futures. The most recent example of this view is to be found in Barbara Cowell's article.<sup>63</sup> She writes, 'if society is to benefit from the intellectual and emotional potential of women, we shall have to ensure that they retain without shame their different qualities', and this may well be achieved by a period of separate education. The conservatism of her view is best shown in the following quotation:

There are few more grotesque sights than that of the supposedly intelligent women who neglects her children, in that short period when they really need her care in order to foster her own ambitions. Such neglect . . . breeds immense resentment in the next generation. Children with the resulting sense of deprivation spend the rest of their lives wrestling from society, from their unfortunate partners, the special attention denied them in infancy.<sup>64</sup>

Girls, according to Cowell, should not be encouraged to *envy* men, just as the working class should not envy those with privilege. Further, they should not aim to



study science since that is just helping to 'propel our civilization down the slippery slope into a completely materialistic way of life'. The tendency of girls to copy boys, and the tendency of women to aspire to the male world only leads, according to her, to unhappiness, high divorce rates and the too high expectations and vast disillusionment of women. In contrast, an emphasis upon gender specialities and differences would allow women to find solidarity amongst other women. This *solidarity* and the *polarity* it produces *between* men and women should be encouraged, in Cowell's view, through single-sex schools during adolescence when the physical, emotional and mental development of girls and boys differs.

What this position represents is a concern to reproduce the dominant set of gender relations through traditional forms of schooling, although Cowell is prepared to compromise with separate schools being on the same campus or very close together so that facilities for joint social functions can be held. The model school for her is the old single-sex grammar school since what was reproduced in such schools were traditional gender differences.

### (3) *The Radical Perspective*

The most radical feminist position has recently been put in Sarah, Scott and Spender's article in *Learning to Lose*.<sup>65</sup> Using much the same data on mixed schools as the liberal reformist and conservative perspectives, these authors argue very forcefully against mixed schools on the basis that they are the main means of reproducing the patriarchal relations of domination. The academic and social relations of schooling, the atmosphere, the ideology of teachers and pupils all contribute to the subordination of girls. In their view it is the presence of boys which affects girls' low self-perception, low academic performance and narrow traditional feminine interests after school. The only way they can suggest to prevent such gender reproduction is through single-sex schools where the 'subversive potential' of schools can be appropriated for feminist practice. With an all-female teaching staff and a female head, girls will perceive that it is not impossible for women to hold power, and to enter the male world of science. They will learn to appreciate feminine friendships and a sense of solidarity with each other. Through the cultivation of 'sisterhood' girls will be able to 'grow and develop their human potential, they will be in a much stronger position to resist oppression in the wider society'.<sup>66</sup> Further, single-sex schools could attempt to counteract the traditional patterns of socialization the girls will have experienced in their homes. As Rosemary Deem summarizes their case:

the emphasis on academic learning in a single sex school is not likely to convey to girls the impression that it is unimportant whether girls do well at school or not, a message which may already be conveyed to girls by their socialization and culture and not always contradicted in mixed schools.<sup>67</sup>

Sex segregation through schooling will not blur or eliminate the boundary between girls and boys but will allow girls to 'find their self confidence and to learn how to challenge patriarchal relations'. On the one hand, the absence of boys and their jokes, their ridicule of girls, their absorption of the teachers' energy, their competitive spirit and their aggression, and, on the other hand, the cultivation of a



feminist consciousness within all-girls' schools leads the authors to support the principle of sex segregation, without reference to the impact this might have upon boys. They recognize that what they are suggesting is radical, but do not think they are being utopian:

We are assuming that universal single sex education for girls would completely resolve the problem of sexism in education but in an age where co-education is heralded as a symbol of progress, it must be made clear that while it may represent progress for boys, for girls it represents a defeat rather than an advance.<sup>68</sup>

## Conclusion

I have tried to show that the issue of co-education and single-sex schools is not just a contemporary but also a historical debate which has involved notions of what the relations between the sexes should be in an educational system which was already class divided. The use of single-sex schooling had been the major form of reproduction of gender relations — relations that constituted the bourgeois ideal of the family form, of male hierarchy and female dependency and subordination. Co-education represented a variation on that form of reproduction — never a radical alternative to the nature of the relations between the sexes. The pattern of educational provision was, therefore, essentially one of gender segregation and differentiation either physically or through the provision of separate classes, activities and curricular options. The nature of differentiation between boys and girls differed between social classes in terms of the type of subjects to be studied. For the working classes, the differentiation is most acute in the craft subjects studied; in the middle classes the science and arts split was the most significant aspect of the gender divide. At no point historically was there an attempt to set up an equal (that is, identical) education for boys and girls.

The evidence for the impact of single-sex and mixed-sex schools must be taken in the context of the type of school discussed, the types of school subjects and the social class origins of pupils before we can adequately decide on the basis of evidence rather than political perspective which type of schooling would benefit girls. Yet even then what will we say about the *education of boys*? The feminist ideals for girls' education, of whatever variety, do not leave a clear strategy as to how to overcome *male prejudicial attitudes* to women. The question remains, are patriarchal and sexist attitudes a female or a male problem? A separate strategy for one sex does not, in my view, challenge the overall reproduction of dominant gender relations. We may merely *interrupt* it by using, for our own purposes, a pre-existing form of schooling. Gender as a basis for allocating individuals will not disappear as an educational or a social variable if schools or classes are allocated to one or other sex, nor will the inequalities of social class, which distinguish the educational experiences and future work lives of working-class and middle-class girls. What the three perspectives offer are ways to change the *form* of reproduction of gender relations: they do not challenge the *causes* of what it is that is reproduced. In other words, they focus on changing the modality of transmission of gender relations without changing *what* should be reproduced. We do not surely want to change the nature of 'femininity' as a concept but rather to abolish it as a social construct into which children are socialized. But we can only do this by under-



standing the meaning and significance the concepts of gender have within patriarchal relations in the family and the waged labour process in advanced capitalism. There is a danger if we do not understand the location of schooling within this political and economic context that we will be naively optimistic in believing that educational reform can change society.

As a political strategy, the support for single-sex education should recognize that small single-sex schools are unlikely to receive resources equal to those of the larger mixed schools in the current climate, especially when it comes to the funding of expensive science, technology and craft courses. Nor are girls' schools likely ever to achieve equal status to boys' schools unless the economic and political basis of patriarchal relations is challenged, since within such relations what is 'female' will always be defined as inferior. Similarly, compensatory educational programmes will run into conflict with the closed nature of the labour market and its gendered structures.

The implications of feminist struggles over sex segregation for class struggles over education cannot be ignored, or seen as separate. Single-sex schooling was part of the reproduction of class relations, in just as significant a way as were the different types of school and curricula provided through secondary schooling. The history of class reproduction, of class relations and bourgeois privilege includes, not as a marginal but as an integral feature, the reproduction of bourgeois family forms (of the norms of heterosexuality, female virginity, and marriage) as well as particular concepts of masculinity and femininity which held together the gender division of labour within paid employment and family life. Support for single-sex schools or sex segregation, therefore, has class connotations. In particular, we may find ourselves pushed into a position of supporting the private single-sex schools against state comprehensives, irrespective of the class selection and privilege involved. Further, we have to be careful that we do not attack comprehensive schools for failing to achieve a programme of reform which, in my view, they were never designed to do, that is, restructure the relations between the sexes in such a way as to eliminate gender as an educational discriminator. Their historical role so far has been to facilitate different 'interests' and 'needs' without taking on the reform of those 'needs' and 'interests'.

Genuine equality of the sexes has not yet been an educational goal and if it is now to become one, should we not, first of all, set up major educational reforms in teacher education, in in-service training programmes to reshape teachers' classroom practice, redesign the curricula and rewrite text books, etc. Should we not try to re-educate parents and employers? Should we not try to uncover the hidden forms of reproduction of gender relations, especially those which underpin the ideologies of parental freedom of choice (which led middle-class parents to choose single-sex schools), of student freedom of choice and of teacher neutrality. In the context of such a programme of educational reform, in my view it will be the co-educational comprehensive schools that will have the resources to offer a more equal education to boys and girls and will have the facility for bringing to the fore the issue of gender discrimination and prejudice, for both male and female pupils and teachers.

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- 12 See also SHAW, J. (1980) 'Education and the individual. Schooling for girls, or mixed schooling — a mixed blessing?', in DEEM, R. (Ed.) (1980) *op. cit.* (Note 9).
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- 16 For a brief review of information on girls' schools, see Report of the Committee on Public Schools appointed by the President of the Board of Education (1942) *The Public Schools and the General Education System*, Chapter 8, HMSO.
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# 8.

## *How shall we educate our sons?*

MADELEINE ARNOT

'My son talks to me of his new interest reading  
adventure/espionage/mystery/space fiction/war  
stuff which little boys' and big boys' worlds  
are made of  
and where women have no place  
though i don't tell him this yet  
instead i watch him entering  
faster and faster  
this world (he can't wait till he's eighteen)  
the man's world  
which circumscribes/denigrates/exploits/obscures/omits  
me  
and i weep inside myself' 1

This paper will focus upon how we should educate our sons so that in Adrienne Rich's words they 'grow into themselves, to discover new ways of being men even as we are discovering new ways of being women'.<sup>2</sup> It is only recently that the women's movement in Britain has turned its attention to 'the problem of men', and as Angela Hamblin has pointed out, although we may now have a clearer idea about what we don't want our sons to become, we have as yet few positive alternative images of maleness to offer.<sup>3</sup>

The recent feminist analysis of co-educational schools has also made the discussion of boys' education urgent, since so much of this research has revealed that, often, it is boys who are the problem for girls in schools. Studies such



as those by Delamont, Spender and Clarricoates have shown us how teachers tend to concentrate their time and energy upon boys in their classrooms, extending more approval *and* more disapproval to boys than to girls.<sup>4</sup> In research such as that conducted by Walkerdine, Stanworth and Fuller, we get glimpses of the extent of boys' disruption of the classroom; their noisiness, their sexual harassment of girls and female teachers, their demands for attention and their need of disciplining and their attitudes to the girls in their class as the silent or the 'faceless' bunch.<sup>5</sup>

The sexism of boys towards their girlfriends and towards girls in their class at school also directly affects girls' image of their future lives and shapes their adolescent culture. Angela McRobbie has criticized youth culture theorists such as Willis and Hebdige for romanticizing male working-class culture, by refusing to notice the harmful effects the 'lads' aggressive sexual styles have upon girls' self respect.<sup>6</sup> Dale Spender has suggested that boys' verbal and physical assaults on girls in school militates against girls' educational advancement, their freedom to acquire confidence in themselves and their abilities.<sup>7</sup> In this context, the placing together of both sexes in mixed schools has been questioned. According to Skinningsrud the ideology of 'proximity will lead to equality' can be shown not just to have failed in the case of girls, but even to have led to reduced chances for girls in the educational system.<sup>8</sup>

In this chapter I shall look at the education of boys in our school system and discuss the ways in which their education can be perceived as a problem not just for girls, but for the boys themselves. I shall argue that co-education is not just a female issue, and that what to do about educating boys cannot be relegated to a side issue in developing a feminist analysis of the educational system.

## Gender and the two cultures

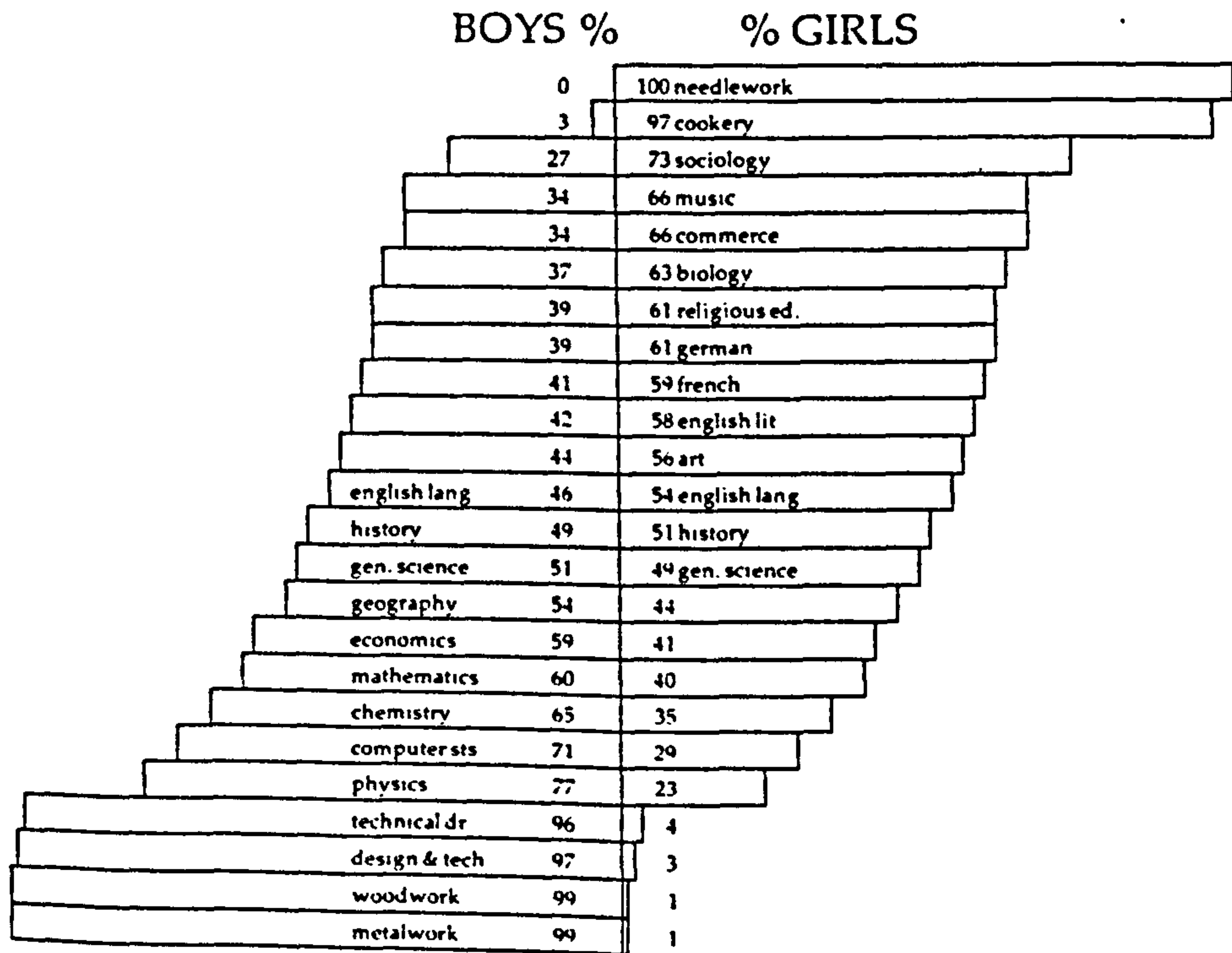
Up until now those concerned with the pattern of girls'



educational achievement have focused upon the patterns of school subject choice as indicative of the limited and limiting range of their education. What is worrying is the fact that girls have tended to choose and study mainly the arts and humanities, particularly when heading for a higher education. On the practical side, girls have selected or been directed towards the domestic crafts rather than technical and engineering subjects. Undoubtedly the absence of women in the world of science and technology, in high-status professions, in skilled jobs, can be seen as a result of their academic choice of non-scientific disciplines. Further, women, it is argued, cannot understand nor actively participate in our modern technological society, without such knowledge.

But what are the implications of boys' education—an

Fig 3.1 GCE 'O' level entries Summer 1980



Source: Harding, J (1982) 'C.D.T. what's missing?'  
*Studies in Design Education, Craft and Technology*  
 Vol. 15, No. 1, winter. Department of Education, University of Keele, Stafford-  
 shire. ST5 5BG.



education which is narrowly restricted to the scientific and technical subjects with only a limited involvement in the humanities and social sciences (other than history or English language)? One could argue, from Figure 3.1, that a binary system of education has been established in which science and technology is a male culture and the study of the world of literature, art, languages, religion, music, domestic crafts is a female culture.

It is also well accepted that such patterns of school subject choice at secondary level affect not just 'O' and 'A' level candidates but also CSE students. In 1980 for example in the area of craft studies, 1000 girls compared with 60,000 boys took woodwork and 600 girls compared with 59,000 boys took metalwork.

The process of gender differentiation of the science/arts cultures begins at primary level. The 1975 DES Survey by HMI reported that during 1973 boys in primary schools were far more likely to be offered mechanical toys than anything to do with the home, dressing up, shopping etc. They were less likely to be found in the school choir and orchestra since 'some boys regard music like poetry as "girlish", and because others regard getting into the football team as the more credit-worthy aim, and therefore go to the football rather than go to the choir practice'.<sup>9</sup>

In middle schools boys were likely to be separated from girls for some aspects of physical education and there was a tendency to 'limit experience in the aesthetic aspects of movement to girls, and thus to restrict boys to activities concerned with skill training'.<sup>10</sup> Boys, in secondary schools were more likely to be offered gymnastics rather than dance-based activities; they were offered less opportunities in aesthetic and creative play, in music and to a lesser extent in art, than girls. Even when they could study music however, only one out of ten boys took the subject at secondary level.

The concern for vocational skill-based training for boys for adult life was clearly reflected in the options offered to them in the fourth and fifth years in secondary school. Boys were more likely to be offered specialist pre-vocational and



practical courses in, for example, agriculture, building, engineering design and surveying rather than recreational or artistic courses. In contrast girls were offered courses designed to prepare them for the home and for 'female' types of occupations—childcare, child development, mothercare and home-making. They were also likely to be in the majority in the integrated courses in social education and citizenship (e.g. citizenship, humanities, design for living, environmental studies, urban studies and social education). A few options were shared by both sexes—such as accountancy, catering, electronics and fashion design.

The pattern of school subject choice in the school subjects considered 'more academic' revealed that boys linked their choices to future 'male' occupations. In 1975 some 47 per cent of boys took physics and 27 per cent chemistry as fourth and fifth year options, compared with 12 per cent and 17 per cent of girls respectively. A higher percentage of boys chose two science subjects than girls, and a lower percentage of boys took foreign languages. At 'A' level the same year, boys were even more concentrated in the sciences with 41 per cent taking mathematics or physics and only 8 per cent and 3 per cent studying French or German.<sup>11</sup> Only one in five boys took English literature at this level compared with one in two girls. Almost double the proportion of girls studied Art and Music at 'A' level than boys. The DES study was carried out in 1973, two years before the Sex Discrimination Act became law. Similar patterns of sex differences based on more recent evidence can be found in a 1982 report on ILEA schools, and in DES Statistics of Education for 'O' level and CSE subjects.<sup>12</sup>

Differences between boys' and girls' school culture can be related to what feminists have identified as a division between the public and private worlds. As Bourdieu has argued, in European societies, dominated as they are by male values, men have become associated with politics, history and war whilst women are associated with the hearth, the novel and psychology. Other divisions such as



those between reason and emotion, science and art, technology and nature, reality and fantasy, objectivity and subjectivity can be seen as derivative and supportive of this public/private division.<sup>13</sup>

The question which concerns us here is how do boys learn to limit their interests to the public sphere, to take such an interest in science and technology and to resist the development of their emotional and artistic selves? Secondly we also need to know what the implications are of such male curricular choices for both boys and girls.

### Becoming a man

The processes of learning which are the 'male' subjects are not dissimilar from those experienced by girls learning 'female' educational routes. The former involve the transmission of particular images of masculinity in children's literature, television, popular music, comics and schoolboy magazines, school textbooks etc. Teachers, parents and other children reinforce, through their expectations, the notions of what is 'manly', what is appropriate and inappropriate for boys at different ages. The processes of learning involve also moving from the world of early childhood male heroes to the more realisable dreams of adult male life. This process I have described as one of 'recontextualization' through which the models of masculinity used in the family, home and in mass media are transformed into the more school-based forms of masculinity, such as 'doing science' and learning how to play football.<sup>14</sup>

The pattern of recontextualization occurs also with the help of the often hidden bias of school materials. As Alison Kelly and others have noted, school science textbooks are filled with masculine imagery, through their choice of photographs of males, examples drawn from the male world, styles of learning and assessment which favour male students, and an impersonal approach which tends to suit boys more than girls.<sup>15</sup> If most science students are



male, it is hardly surprising since the occupations envisaged for the successful science student are those currently dominated by men.

Within the family also, as Alison Kelly *et al*'s recent study has shown, both working-class and middle-class parents were far more concerned that their sons took science and craft subjects rather than the less vocational subjects such as languages, Arts and domestic subjects.<sup>16</sup> Further when it came to giving help with school work the science/arts division was reinforced by the mother helping her son with English and the father helping him with mathematics. In neither social class were boys encouraged to wash and mend clothes, cook, clean the house or wash up. The most they might be asked was to help with the shopping and tidy their own rooms and clean their own shoes. Families, therefore, were likely to develop the need for boys to have full-time 'house' wives to look after them in adult life.

Parental expectations of boys' lives are also reinforced by other aspects of school life such as careers guidance. The EOC, for example, found that school careers literature depicted men and boys too often as 'independent, active, strong and interested in their work', whereas they could be portrayed as sensitive, caring and with their own domestic commitments.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore the sex-segregation of teaching staff by subject is also likely to reinforce a boy's view that certain subjects are not 'masculine'. In 1977, for example, in secondary schools, male teachers constituted only 1 per cent of the home economics teaching staff, 38 per cent of the French and 44 per cent of English teachers compared with 99 per cent of craft, design and technology course teachers, 88 per cent of physics and 82 per cent of chemistry teachers.<sup>18</sup>

### The ideology of masculinity and its implications

Let us now return to the question I raised earlier. What are



the likely implications of a pattern of sex-divided school subject choice for boys and girls? The first and most direct implication is that by their limited exposure to the arts, the humanities and social sciences boys are not encouraged to think about human values, wider social issues and their personal lives. They concentrate upon obtaining skills for living in only one sphere of social life, probably leaving school 'ill-equipped for personal independence and for taking shared responsibility in home and family life'.<sup>19</sup> They are poorly prepared for dealing with people and for dealing with their own emotions.

The more general implications of this pattern of male education is that through subject choices, a specific ideology of the family is being perpetuated. This ideology of the family is one in which men are expected to become the breadwinner and to have a dependent wife and dependent children. In order to fulfil this role, it is a major priority for boys to find themselves an occupation and earn a living, first for themselves and later for their families. The notion of 'education for work' has particular meaning therefore for the reproduction of masculinity. Further, the process of reproducing the link between masculinity and paid work is one which affects not just men but also women. It makes the ideological assumption that women will not be major breadwinners and can therefore be paid less than men for similar work,<sup>20</sup> since they are likely to marry and become financial dependents of men. Women's primary role in life is therefore defined as the care and servicing of the family. Such assumptions and ideologies about boys' education match well those state policies which support the man as head of the household and treat women as dependents of men (e.g. family law, social security, taxation).

The result of ideologies about masculinity is that boys are taught to see their major commitment and interest in life as life-long paid work (or as long as the economy needs them). Unemployment strikes hard at men's definition of themselves 'as men'. Paid work after all is defined as the focus of their lives, and the criteria through which men



judge other men. Endless striving for success in the occupational world or in the class cultures which surround and are based in that world, means also that a man's sexuality may be defined by his occupational status. In the USA it has been said that masculinity and success with women is defined by the size of the paycheck.<sup>21</sup> In the context of male working-class life in Britain, the importance of work, of a job and a wage are well-known features of working-class masculinity. The research of Paul Willis on working-class 'lads' attests to the importance for such boys of leaving school as soon as possible to earn a wage and prove themselves *as men*.<sup>22</sup> Middle-class boys, on the other hand, may stay in the educational system into their mid-twenties. Nevertheless, there is a close link between men's salary level and their sense of achievement as men.

The ideology of vocationalism for boys has been one rationale for changes within the state school system since the nineteenth century. As Wolpe has shown, the *common code* of government thinking has been that boys' main interests ought to lie in the world of paid work and that a school system could and should be designed to cater for skill differences within that world. The social class differences in educational attainment of boys therefore were and still are seen as more significant than those of girls (all of whom could be assumed to become wives and mothers).<sup>23</sup> The ideals of meritocracy can also be seen as ideals of a male meritocracy, encouraging amongst boys a sense of individualism, competitiveness and materialism. In this context, the labelling of some as academic 'successes' and others as 'failures' by teachers and through examinations has had particular significance for boys *as boys*. It is to this psychological level that I will now turn.

### The problem for boys

There is a body of opinion that has worried over the effects of such educational patterning for boys' mental health and

emotional stability. This is particularly the case in the USA where the 'masculine mystique' is considered to lead to a variety of social problems. Steinem for example, quotes the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence who reported that the USA is the 'clear leader among modern, stable democratic nations in its rates of homicide, assault, rape and robbery, and at least among the highest in incidence of group violence and assassination'.<sup>24</sup> Most of these violent crimes are committed by men between 15 and 24 years of age. Proving masculinity, the report explains 'may require frequent rehearsal of toughness, the exploitation of women and quick, aggressive responses'. The masculine ethic is more likely to encourage tough policies of showmanship, of seeking victories especially in American foreign policy: 'Peace at any price is humiliation, but victory at any price—even genocide in Indochina and chaos at home — is quite all right. So goes the Masculine Mystique'.<sup>25</sup>

The link between aggressive political life, militarism, racism and sexism and Western notions of masculinity<sup>26</sup> also has personal implications:

The first tragedy of this role-playing is personal. Men are made to feel they must earn their manhood by suppressing emotion, perpetuating their superiority over women (and, in racist societies, over non-white men as well), and imposing their will on others whether by violence or by economic means.<sup>27</sup>

The work of the school in imposing these aspects of masculinity is therefore criticized for the unnecessary pressure brought to bear upon boys, academically and vocationally. Lowenstein's report for the National Conference of Parent-Teacher Associations in the United States argued that boys' personal defeats and failures:

bring about a diminishing of the ego, a self-hatred and sometimes even greater tragedies. Schools are unlikely to see a boy who has neurotically high standards for himself as acting self-destructively.<sup>28</sup>



In 1982 the EOC funded a conference called 'What's in it for boys?', supported by ILEA and the Schools Council. Introducing the report of the conference Leslie Mapp observed that for men to adopt the expected male role and conform to society's notion of masculinity in our society comes at a cost. Men, he argued, pay a price for their privilege. This price includes:

the suppression of emotion, a predatory sexuality and a level of personal anxiety which demands continual competition to out-perform others.<sup>29</sup>

The opening speaker at the conference, Kate Myers, commented that the traditional masculine values of taking as much pain as possible without giving in, being able to 'hold' alcohol, to show no feelings, to be competitive is hardly likely to fit in with equal participation in parenthood, with valuing women and respecting an equality of the sexes.<sup>30</sup>

According to psychologists such as Horney and Chodorow, boys learn to become men through a process of avoiding, even of coming to dread any association with, the feminine.<sup>31</sup> With an absent father, male children have no male model to copy, only their ever-present mother. The way of achieving masculinity becomes, therefore, a process of devaluing women, of rejecting female objects, activities, emotions, interests, etc. Boys learn to eschew the domestic and to repress the emotional sides of life. Quoting the work of Margaret Mead, Chodorow argues that maleness in our society is never absolutely defined.<sup>32</sup> Unlike femininity, which in a patriarchal society is ascribed, masculinity and manhood has to be achieved, in a permanent process of struggle and confirmation.

In this context it is hardly surprising that it is boys who are the most prone to construct and use gender categories. Not only do they have more at stake in such a system of classification (i.e. male power). Also they have to try to achieve manhood through the dual process of distancing women and femininity from themselves *and* maintaining

the hierarchy and social superiority of masculinity by devaluing the female world. When boys come into contact with girls in mixed schools therefore the likelihood is that there will be a considerable polarization between boys and girls, their interests, activities, curriculum choices, friendship groups etc. As Jenny Shaw argues:

... the social structure of mixed schools may drive children to make even more sex-stereotyped subject choices, precisely because of the constant presence of the other sex and the pressure to maintain boundaries, distinctiveness and identity.<sup>33</sup>

The pressure to conform to the masculine ideal and to maintain the gender classification may originally be generated within the home, but soon it is internalized by boys 'who hold both themselves and their peers to account over it'.<sup>34</sup> Male youth cultures become critical elements in 'policing' the boundaries of masculinity. Such youth cultures and male peer groups can also be found in single-sex schools where an imaginary female is constructed to delineate the borders between what is male and what is female. As one teacher in a boys' school described it:

It seems to me that the boys create an inferior or outside group and level the abuse at them that they would otherwise direct at the girls. The least 'manly' boys become the target and are used as substitute girls in a way.

In an all boys school a group of 'not-real-boys' gets created. They are called the poofers and the cissies and are constantly likened to girls. The sexual hierarchy gets set up but some boys have to play the part that the girls would take in a mixed school. But of course they are still *all* boys and so the results of the pseudo-girls still stand as the result of boys.<sup>35</sup>

### Educational solutions: single-sex or mixed schools?

The solutions to such problems of boys' excessive striving for manhood, their devaluation of women and their per-



sonal repression of their emotions more often than not have been laid at the feet of mothers and female teachers who are blamed for their oppressive stance towards boys. Lowenstein, for example, takes the data that feminists have argued shows the bias of teachers against *girls* and argues just the reverse<sup>36</sup> He points out that boys get too much attention from teachers, especially in mixed classrooms since teachers expect boys to be more difficult than girls. Teachers tend to leave girls more alone and pick on the boys. He thinks teachers are reluctant to let boys show warmth or feelings; on the other hand, they punish them for acting in a masculine way. Boys receive more physical punishment than girls, and excessive demands are made of their physical prowess. Teachers speak more harshly to boys. In the late 1960s such a view of male 'emasculatation' by female school teachers was particularly current in the USA, where it was linked into the apparent disaffection of male students with the Vietnamese War and with society in general. The feminine environment of the family home and the early years of schooling were seen as the cause as in this example:

Today's hurt, angry little Johnny, feeling shortchanged by his woman teacher who favours little girls, often learns to hate school, nurses his resentment, and sometimes grows into tomorrow's embittered or maladjusted juvenile delinquent, defiant dope-user, sit-in striker, or draft-card burner who laughs at authority.<sup>37</sup>

Mixed schools were identified as the problem, since here the female teachers could favour their own sex—the notion of the 'good pupil' was the female pupil. Female teachers were portrayed as antagonistic to the opposite sex, said to 'prefer conformity, mental passivity and gentle obedience—at which girls excel—to the aggressive drive and originality of many boys'.<sup>38</sup>

The solution for some was not just to encourage more men to enter teaching at primary level, but also to remove boys from contact with female pupils. Pollack reports an

experiment conducted in the late 1960s at Wakefield Forest Elementary School, Virginia, in which separate classes for each sex were set up. Apparently such sex segregation resulted in fewer serious discipline problems. Boys who had been withdrawn became more outgoing and more confident. In health classes both boys and girls were more at ease. The Principal at the time said of the experiment:

boys are more thoughtful and considerate of each other, wanting to help each other. The lack of distraction from the opposite sex results in better work habits. Boys take part more freely in art and music and do better work in foreign languages when in separate classes. Boys and girls overcome their fear of standing in front of the class to give reports and oral readings.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the beneficial effects upon the pupils, such segregation was based on the reinforcement of the differences between the sexes. Girls were given quieter games, fairy stories, and games and songs which emphasized feminine activities such as sewing and housekeeping. Boys were encouraged, on the other hand, into active physical games, noise and muscle movement based upon 'a transportation theme'.

The segregation of boys and girls in school and between schools is a practice well known in English educational history. Its purpose has been precisely to reproduce a more coherent sense of masculinity and femininity rather than to promote equality of the sexes. However, a continual dilemma of such segregated education has been that male bonding in all boys schools can go too far—leading either to homosexuality or to excessive aggression on the part of the boys. The solution to both these problems has been, for some, the introduction of girls into the major public schools. Girls, in their traditional 'femininity' have been used as a means of 'civilizing' boys—never it would seem has the argument been reversed. But do boys become less stereotyped into masculine traits in mixed schools? Do they widen their education? What the DES Report in 1975 discovered was that boys in mixed schools had less oppor-



tunity to study history, yet more chance to study music and French and German than boys in single-sex schools. However, in terms of subject choice, boys were more likely to study history, French and German in boys' only schools. The tendency overall was, therefore, that boys and girls were more polarized into the science/arts split in mixed schools than in single-sex schools. This ties in with the discussion of greater gender differentiation in mixed schools outlined above.

It must be remembered, however, that boys do well in either type of school compared with girls. Also, boys of different social classes achieve differentially. Working-class boys, Douglas *et al.* found at 11 and 15 years of age performed better on reading and mathematics tests in single-sex grammar schools. Middle-class boys also seem to get an added advantage in single-sex schools of all school types (grammar or secondary modern). Overall the sex structure of secondary modern schools seems to have made little difference to male pupils, in this early study.<sup>40</sup> However, there did seem to be additional academic advantages in single-sex grammar school education for boys.

A contrasting advantage of boys' schools lies in a completely different purpose—that of trying to *change* boys' attitudes to masculinity and femininity and sex roles. In one school in London (Hackney Downs) teachers have exploited the single-sex environment of their school to set up a pilot scheme called 'Skills for Living'.<sup>41</sup> In this project boys are encouraged to think about such things as food preparation, shopping and baby care, to anticipate their future domestic lives. Classes discuss sexism in birthday cards, children's toys and books. The pupils are also encouraged to treat each other in a caring way. What the teachers are attempting is a redefinition of men's role in the family and a forum for boys to make themselves more aware of society's and their own assumptions about male and female roles. Such small-scale experiments point the way to a large-scale reform programme that could be developed within single-sex boys' schools.

Yet any reform programme involving the 'emancipation of men' requires more than a restructuring of their school lives, although obviously this is an essential, not a marginal component. The definitions of masculinity which I have talked about are historical products—they are integral to the development of our sort of society. What has emerged with the establishment of a patriarchal and a capitalist society is the division between the public and private worlds (of paid employment and family life), to which I referred earlier. This division has also become firmly associated with the division between male and female in such a way that men are now absent members of their homes, they are seen as the main breadwinner and as the head of a household of economic dependents.<sup>42</sup> Until this structure of family and work life is challenged we cannot expect boys to easily relinquish their notions of manhood, machismo and their devaluation of all that is female. The emancipation of men therefore has to tie in with a variety of other strategies to negate the influence of gender divisions within our lives.

In this context the problem of boys and for boys of existing definitions of masculinity cannot really be solved by arguing either for single-sex or for mixed schools. The content of what is taught, school ideologies about the relations between the sexes (irrespective of whether they are both present or one sex is absent), the structure of classroom life and the sex of the teacher, all play a part in either contributing or challenging boys' assumptions about sex differences and their own sexual identities. The presence of girls in mixed schools may have different effects on boys' self-image and their attitudes to women than an all boys' school, but it is not clear that either type of school in and of itself will reduce the sexism of boys.

In the short term, programmes for reducing sexism in both types of school are essential. In the long term however, if the overall aim is to remove gender as an organizing variable of educational provision, then one has to challenge the existence of schools based upon a division of the



school population according to their sex. This is certainly what the National Union of Teachers decided in 1976 when they argued:

Boys and girls who are respectively educated in single sex schools are not afforded the same opportunities, and the education available to them will continue to reflect the 'raison d'être' of the school, i.e. to educate boys and girls according to the needs of boys and girls as if those needs were distinguishable from each other.<sup>43</sup>

The NUT also point out there is a 'sound economic case' to be made in supporting co-educational schools since far more effective use can be made of the resources, the teaching staff, facilities, organizational structures etc. if the two sexes are educated in one school.

A final point needs to be made which is that the definitions of masculinity made available and negotiated by boys are not universal—they may well have their own variant in each social class.<sup>44</sup> The debate around whether to provide mixed or single-sex schools for boys cannot therefore ignore that class specificity. Gender identity can be a form of escape from a position of class subordination; it can be the form through which individuals celebrate personal values in an alienated society. Any reform programme, therefore, has to take account of this placing of gender definitions within a class context and to realize just how fundamental the structure of family life and work life is to both middle-class men and working-class men.

To challenge the results, the repercussions of the division between a male public and a female private world, the division and the hierarchy between the sexes is to take on patriarchy. Masculinity, in all its various forms, is not the same as femininity—it is after all a form of *power* and *privilege*. How we design an educational system to remove that power is an enormous challenge and certainly it will involve a variety of different strategies inside and outside the school. But perhaps—because as Margaret Mead has pointed out, maleness isn't absolutely defined but has to be re-earned every day—the possibility is there that daily

intervention by teachers, by parents, by boys themselves and girls will have considerable effect.<sup>45</sup> Male dominance, like class dominance, requires at some point that others 'give consent' to that domination and it is here that we should seek reform. As Hamblin points out:

Patriarchy depends, for its continuation, on our sons. It needs them to become the next generation of adult male oppressors of women in order to continue to reproduce this system of male supremacy. But what would happen to the patriarchal system if our sons did not carry out this allotted task?<sup>46</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Astra in Friedman and Sarah (1982), p. 249.
- 2 Rich (1977), quoted in Hamblin (1982).
- 3 Hamblin (1982).
- 4 Delamont (1980), Spender (1982a) and Clarricoates (1980).
- 5 Walkerdine (1981), Stanworth (1983) and Fuller (1980).
- 6 McRobbie (1980). Among authors included in her critique are Willis (1977) and Hebdige (1979).
- 7 Spender (1982b).
- 8 Skinningsrud (1982).
- 9 DES (1975), p. 3.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 11 The comparable figures for girls supplied by the DES (1975) study were 9 per cent physics, 11 per cent mathematics, 24 per cent French, 9 per cent German.
- 12 ILEA (1982); *DES statistics on education*, Vol. 2 School leavers, published annually, gives information on GCE and CSE subjects entered and passed by both sexes. Additionally, Vicky Ling—an MPhil student at the Department of Social Sciences, Polytechnic of the South Bank, London, SE1—is carrying out research on girls' option choices in five inner London Schools.
- 13 Bourdieu (1977) and see also MacDonald (now Arnot) (1980).
- 14 MacDonald (1980).
- 15 Kelly (1981).
- 16 Kelly (1982).
- 17 EOC (1980).



- 18 See EOC (1982a), p. 10.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 20 The Equal Pay Act 1970 makes it illegal to pay one sex less than the other for equal work. But if employers regrade similar work for each sex differently, then no case for equal pay is answerable.
- 21 Gould (1974).
- 22 Willis (1977).
- 23 Wolpe (1976).
- 24 Steinem (1974), p. 135.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 137.
- 26 For other analyses of this theme see Hoch (1979).
- 27 Steinem (1974), p. 135.
- 28 Lowenstein (1980), p. 113.
- 29 Mapp (1982), in EOC (1982).
- 30 Myers (1982), in EOC (1982).
- 31 Horney (1932) and Chodorow (1971).
- 32 Chodorow (1971) and Mead (1949).
- 33 Shaw (1976), p. 137.
- 34 Chodorow (1971), p. 186 and see also Hartley (1974).
- 35 Quoted by Spender (1982a), p. 121.
- 36 Lowenstein (1980). The research to which Lowenstein refers is reviewed by Lobban (1978).
- 37 Pollack (1968), p. 21.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- 40 Douglas and Ross (1966).
- 41 Reported in EOC (1982a), and *The Sunday Times* 20 March 1983, p. 13. See also Moore (1981) and National Association of Youth Clubs (1981) for discussion of youth work projects for boys.
- 42 For more detailed discussion of this point see Tolson (1977).
- 43 NUT (1976).
- 44 Such an analysis is further developed elsewhere, see Arnot (1983).
- 45 Mead (1949).
- 46 Hamblin (1982).

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## **PART 3: INTERPRETING THE POLITICS OF GENDER REFORM**

# 9. State Education Policy and Girls' Educational Experiences

Madeleine Arnot

This chapter discusses the various ways in which the educational system has contributed to the lives of women in British society. It focuses on the pattern of female education and educational achievement and considers to what extent the intervention of the state into the educational arena has benefited the majority of girls.

The chapter also investigates the various factors which need to be taken into account in explaining the patterns of female education. It analyzes the structure of education and training provision for girls historically and the ideologies underlying that provision. Later the chapter discusses the variety of factors which can broadly be described as 'educational organization': factors such as early childhood experiences, school organization and classroom practice. Explaining how and why girls and women are educated as they are is not a simple task; it reveals the complexity of the educational system, the intricacies of its internal structures and processes and the importance of its relations with external structures such as those of the waged labour process and the family. The analysis also underlines the fact that we cannot talk about female education satisfactorily without some reference to other forms of social inequality in our society, particularly those of class and race.

I begin, therefore, by looking at the nature of girls' experiences in schools and by considering the impact of class, race and gender relations on their lives. The effect of different forms of social inequalities can also be seen in the outcomes of schooling—for instance in the patterns of educational achievement and the 'take up' of educational opportunities in higher education. In the second section these outcomes will be investigated before discussing the various social and educational explanations for such experiences and levels of educational achievement.

## Girls' educational experiences

It is difficult to know where to begin providing an assessment of the impact of the educational system on the lives of women. Most accounts start with the statistics on educational achievement, identifying areas of female educational disadvantage and 'underachievement'. Yet is success or failure in obtaining educational certificates or in studying certain subjects the only effect of



schooling, and are qualifications the only factor affecting female employment patterns and future life styles? A feminist account of education needs, in my view, to begin with the concept of gender and to develop an understanding of how definitions of gender, of masculinity and femininity, shape our lives. We need to investigate how specific concepts of masculinity and femininity are constructed and how they are adopted by individual girls and boys. Central to this analysis, I want to argue, are the ways in which girls make sense of the definitions of femininity presented to them, how they reconcile the messages of home and school, and the experiences within community and personal relations, and how they construct for themselves personal values and identities within the constraints of their class, racial and gendered positions.

In this chapter there is only the space to look at a few examples of the sort of research now beginning to be available on girls' lives in and outside school and girls' own views of the role school should play in shaping their futures. In such research we can see an attempt being made to relate macro-structures such as class and racial divisions to girls' definitions of themselves as women. Here we glimpse the diversity and contradictions within female gender roles, class- and 'race'-specific definitions of femininity, as well as common female experiences. In the relations between (a) schools and communities, between (b) family and school cultures, and (c) in the forms of gender conformity and resistance we find indications of the impact and meaning of schooling on girls.

Let us begin with the work of Katherine Clarricoates (1980) which suggests ways in which definitions of masculinity and femininity transmitted in different primary schools might be shaped by the occupational structure and class relations of each locality. The value of this research is that it moves away from a simple notion of gender entailing a dichotomy between the masculine and feminine which applies to all children irrespective of their social class origins. Clarricoates found, for example, that in the traditional working-class primary school, a 'rigid conformity' to the 'fixed' masculine qualities of strength, toughness, dominance and bravery was expected of men, whereas women were seen as submissive, weak and located within the home, even though there were a large number of women in paid employment. In contrast, in the middle-class community school, the ideology of the school was that of academic achievement, and boys were seen as the intellectual elite, having imagination, ability and creativity. Although there were less explicit gender differences in this school, girls were expected to concentrate more on being clean, well dressed and controlled in their language rather than becoming academically oriented. Thus, although in both schools femininity was considered different and inferior to masculinity, the boundaries and the nature of the division between boys and girls differed for the different social class clienteles.

Another facet of the interaction of class and gender is in the impact of schooling, which varies for boys and girls of the working class and the middle class, whether in rural, urban or suburban environments. From a considerable amount of sociological work, we know that the school culture and its organization is based on and gives legitimacy to a specifically middle-class



culture and language. Thus children from different social classes experience the school in a variety of ways.

For those girls who enter fee-paying schools, the experience is likely to be one of continuity of class culture, since the schools teach and encourage the development of upper-middle-class notions of femininity. The conflict between home and school may not be great, and therefore the impact of the pattern of socialization offered by such schools may be very forceful.

In the nineteenth century, girls' public schools were set up, modelling themselves upon the already existing and successful boys' public schools. They developed prefect systems, houses, uniforms, and boarding education, and attempted to gain all the accoutrements of the high social status already held by boys' schools. What these girls' schools had in common with the boys' schools was that pupils were excluded from any contact with the supposedly polluting environment of other social classes, of members of the opposite sex, of contact with the modern ideas of an urban and materialistic culture. Even today, despite changes in these schools, attendance at a private girls' school means developing a distinctive class consciousness and a recognition of the boundaries of that social class. This *class socialization* involves learning the specific concepts of femininity that complement its antithesis—the masculinity of upper-middle-class men. Such a masculinity is learnt in the team games, the house spirit and the training in leadership offered by the boys' public schools. In contrast to a boy's education—with its stress on visions of political power, initiative, independence and leadership—what Judith Okely (1978) experienced at a girls' private school was constant supervision, centralized control and a training in obedience. Whereas in the boy's school one might find vertical social groups with senior pupils having control over juniors, in Okely's school less emphasis was placed on pupil hierarchy, and more emphasis on following rules. Girls were encouraged to learn the 'language of the body' through the rules of posture and feminine physical sports and games. She writes:

The boys' and girls' educations are not symmetrical but they are ideologically interdependent. That considered female is partly defined by its opposite: that which is considered to be male. The characteristics of one institution are strengthened by their absence in the other. Qualities primarily reserved for one gender will have a different meaning in the institution for the opposing gender. The two educations are also linked in practice since, in adulthood, individuals from the separate institutions will be united in marriage, for the consolidation of their class. As members of the same social class the girls and boys may share similar educational experiences, but as members of different gender categories some of their education may differ. (p.110)

Through such similarities and differences in single-sex public schools, the division of labour between men and women of the upper-middle classes can be transmitted. Indeed, the introduction of girls into boys' private schools does not seem to have affected this process since such schools still use very traditional notions of masculinity and femininity.

In contrast the experience of a working-class girl who achieves entry into a single-sex, state grammar school shows that the culture, the ethos and



demands of the school can conflict with a child's own background. The differences between the class culture of the school and her family are experienced by Irene Payne (1980) in terms of the different definitions of femininity expected of her. Thus, even though she came from a male-headed family and was educated in a 'patriarchal' educational system, her experience was not a consistent one of oppression and the continuous reinforcement of *one* definition of gender. The following extract shows how the school uniform symbolized the interconnectedness of the class and gender culture of the school:

The first clear set of values was characterized by the school uniform. The class roots of school uniform are fairly clear because their origins are in the public schools. Institutional colours, mottoes and crests were all part of the total image derived from the ruling class. The uniform represented a sobriety and discipline whose power extended beyond the school. I can remember that prefects had the responsibility of ensuring that girls wore their berets on the bus journeys on public transport to and from school. The power of the ideology showed itself in the fact that they meticulously performed their function and reported girls seen without their berets. The uniform was part of a process of destroying individual and class identity, in order that pupils would submit unquestioningly to school authority and what that represented. School control extended even to such hidden recesses as underwear and was enforced with a vengeance, by regular inspections. Punishable offences included wearing the wrong coloured or knickers or socks. These practices were part of the process of enforcing a particular set of bourgeois values, based on ideas of respectability, smartness and appearances.

However, I think there was a further dimension to this, in terms of gender. The uniform couldn't have been better designed to disguise any hints of adolescent sexuality. I suppose that shirt and tie, the 'sensible' shoes, thick socks and navy blue knickers were part of a more 'masculinised' image. It was as though femininity had to be symbolically sacrificed to the pursuit of knowledge. Modesty was implicit as there were regulations about the length of skirts and the covering of your arms. Jewellery, make-up and nylon stockings were taboo. Ideas about dress were based on notions of 'nice' girls and 'not so nice' girls, with both class and sexual connotations. We were, after all, to be turned into middle-class young ladies.

I wore the uniform without too much suffering at school but it was the greatest source of embarrassment to me beyond the school gates. I can remember being terrified that someone from my neighbourhood might see me wearing it. I was worried that I might be regarded as a 'college pud' or a snob by my peers. If they saw anyone in school uniform they would usually jeer and hurl abuse. But it had sexual as well as class connotations. As I got older, I was particularly concerned that potential boyfriends didn't see me in this 'unfeminine' garb. The first thing I always did when I got home from school was dash to my bedroom to change out of my uniform. However, my rebellion against school uniform was never very strong as I wanted to do well at school and wearing uniform was part of the process of earning approval.

It is interesting . . . that the rebellion against school uniform did take on a very 'feminine' form. Within the grammar school, there were groups of working-class girls as well as disaffected middle-class girls who were alienated from school and just wanted to leave as soon as possible. Their rebellion manifested itself in the usual things like smoking or being rude to teachers. However, it was also structured along 'feminine' lines, in opposition to the 'masculinity' of



school rules about appearance. I can remember bouffant hairstyles, fish-net stockings, make-up and 'sticky out' underskirts being the hallmarks of rebellious girls. All of these stressed femininity and the girls involved were also noted for being 'experienced' with boys. The rebellion's ultimate culmination was in getting pregnant, which meant that a denial of sexual activity was no longer possible. Such matters were always carefully hushed up and the girl concerned quickly removed. (p.13-15).

This account suggests *first*, that gender definitions are not just class specific but can be a form of *social control*, particularly when they are imposed on children of another social class and, *second*, that there may be *discontinuities* between the definitions of femininity and masculinity learnt in the home and those learnt in schools. The pattern of gender socialization may, therefore, *not* be a smooth process but rather one in which contradictions emerge that have to be resolved by the boys and girls themselves. The family and the school do not, therefore, always work in concert in what is often described as a continuous process of socialization. Schools may be more 'progressive' or more 'conservative' than parental culture. Further, the disjuncture between working-class and middle-class culture experienced at school age may well account for the failure of working-class children - and in particular the failure of working-class girls - to seize all the educational opportunities offered to them.

For the working-class girl or boy especially, the experience is often one of being confronted with an alien culture which bears very little relation to her or his everyday life - the effect can be rejection of the school ethos and the ideology of academic achievement. Many of the struggles found within schools today can be understood, therefore, as a form of class struggle - a result of conflicting value systems and culture. However, it is rare that such conflict is seen as also being related to gender. The work of Paul Willis (1977) is interesting in this respect since he shows that working-class 'lads' who reject the school celebrate a particular notion of masculinity derived to a large extent from their fathers. This prepares them in many ways for their eventual fates as manual workers. Their version of masculinity differs from that offered by the school, in that the boys identify being male with leaving school as early as possible to earn a wage, with enjoying the physicality of sports, with choosing manual work and joking with the 'lads', rather than valuing academic success.

Such conflict between home and school takes another form when girls are involved, particularly since girls, whatever the class culture, are in a subordinate position. They can never achieve the 'superiority' that the 'lads' experience; but what they can do is find other ways of re-establishing a sense of their own worth and of their identity.

Angela McRobbie (1978a) has conducted research on a group of teenage girls who have, to all intents and purposes, rejected not just the school but also, significantly, its definitions of femininity as alien to their own way of life and their perception of their futures. Paradoxically, the centre of these working-class girls' resistance to school was their notion of femininity, derived from their family and 'worked-on' by the culture of their peer group:

... one way in which the girls combat the class-based and oppressive features of



the school is to assert their 'femaleness', to introduce into the classroom their sexuality and their physical maturity in such a way as to force teachers to take notice. A class instinct then finds expression at the level of jettisoning the official ideology for girls in the school (neatness, diligence, appliance, femininity, passivity, etc.) and replacing it with a *more* feminine, even sexual one. Thus the girls took great pleasure in wearing make-up to school, spent vast amounts of time discussing boyfriends in loud voices in class and used these interests to disrupt the class. (p.104)

If the school, therefore, asserts the ideology of equality of opportunity and, to a certain extent, 'unsexes' children through its stress on the importance of academic success, then the danger is that it denies an important source of self-evaluation of working-class girls (and boys) through gender categories. It may be that the family culture and, in particular, its gender definitions become the major obstacles to educational achievement. The definitions of femininity which working-class girls construct for themselves can encapsulate the dreams as well as the reality of marriage, female sexuality, and romance.

It is a moot point whether this notion of femininity, which may lead girls to aspire to motherhood rather than to careers, is a result of a realistic appreciation of the limited work opportunities that face working-class girls on the labour market or is, in fact, a very unrealistic diverting of their aspirations through which they lose out within the competitive educational system. What is clear is that this notion of femininity is not constructed in a vacuum, but rather in the complex set of relations that exist between family, school, class culture and peer group. In this sense it would be hard to attribute 'blame' either to the school or to the working-class family culture. The particular version of schooling that working-class girls receive pushes them into a situation where they 'freely choose' their own subordination. As a result, they head for domesticity, towards low-skilled and low-paid employment and dependence eventually on the male wage. Thus the girls' own culture of 'femininity' and romance has the effect of strengthening gender stereotypes by exaggerating them.

This experience is, however, not shared by all girls in comprehensive schools. Lynn Davies (1978), for example, found a variety of girls' responses, some of which were similar to boys' in similar academic streams, e.g. in their attitudes to teachers, their anxieties over achievement, the 'boringness' of school assemblies, homework etc. Where girls' experiences differed from those of boys were in their attitudes to school uniforms and to the types of school subjects they were pushed towards (e.g. child care rather than metalwork). Meyenn (1980) found that school control over the accoutrements of femininity (such as make-up and jewellery) were critical determinants of girls' responses to schooling. He discovered that the girls most likely to be pro-school (i.e. academic achievers) had the same attitudes to school authority as girls who could be described as anti-school, since they both opposed the school's policy forbidding the wearing of make-up. The division, therefore, between 'conformists' and 'resisters' on the basis of academic work alone was not useful in describing different girls' responses to schooling.

Mary Fuller's (1980) research has shown, in the case of Afro-Caribbean



schoolgirls, the subtleties of negotiation and resistance. Their anger and frustration at school led to their positive acceptance of being black and female. They rejected the double stereotypes of blackness and femininity, not turning against themselves or against whites or the opposite sex, but by exploiting the school. They aimed to achieve good educational qualifications, obtain decent jobs and move out of their subordinate position. The acquisition of good qualifications gave them a sense of their own worth and of control over their lives. They conformed, therefore, to the notion of a 'good pupil' only in so far as they worked conscientiously at schoolwork.

In the classroom they gave the appearance of inattention, boredom and indifference. Fuller, in her analysis of these girls also calls into question the equation between academic striving and success, on the one hand, and conformity, on the other. What her study reveals is that partial negotiation of stereotypes and a sense of 'going it alone' gave the girls a means of exploiting the school system without becoming subordinate.

Kathryn Riley (1982) in a more recent piece of research found very similar patterns of response to school by fifth and sixth form girls of Afro-Caribbean origins. These girls did not see themselves as peripheral to male black culture, nor as passive sexual objects. They intended to organize and control their lives, using the more positive aspects of school life for themselves to help them achieve more equal terms with men. Their sense of realism, however, also came out clearly when talking about race discrimination in the job market:

*Christine:* It's mostly whites, whites do the jobs with the good qualifications... They just put up some barriers, or make some excuses.

*Angela:* You can't get jobs. There should be jobs, but it depends on the employer as well. He might be one of those who doesn't like blacks. I mean, if a white person and a black person went to the same school and got the same degrees, the white person is more entitled to get it than the black. I mean, we're all classed as stupid. (p. 12)

Such experiences of black girls in schools cannot be treated as just another variant of white schoolgirls' experiences. The relations between class and gender are made more complicated by those of race in our society. To ignore the effect of racism is to render black girls' experiences invisible and to treat as insignificant the part played by white people in maintaining race inequality and oppression (see Brah and Minhas (1985), and Carby (1982)). Pratibha Parmar (1981) suggests that the experiences of Davinder, a sixth form student are not uncommon among Asian girls in schools today:

When I was in my second year at school and you walked down the corridor and if there were gangs of white girls they could always pick on us and call us 'wogs' and 'Pakis' and everything like that. One day it happened to me, but I could speak up for myself, so it was quite good, you see. I was walking down with my friend and they started hitting us, they think you are entirely stupid, because you are Indian, and you won't stick up for yourself. They enjoy it if you don't say anything. I told my tutor about it, told her that they shouldn't be allowed to do things like that, should they, and she said, 'We will see what we can do about it.' But she didn't say or do anything. Some teachers' unwillingness to take any action in such situations is not the only way in which they expose their racism:



often they use their authority to abuse Black pupils by calling them 'uncivilized animals'.

(Parmar, 1981, pp. 26-27)

These authors suggest that in order to recognize fully the impact of racism in education on black girls' lives it is necessary to rethink existing feminist perspectives, and to ask new questions. We might ask, for example, whether class relations are as significant for black girls as they can be shown to be for white girls, or whether the experience of being black in a racially prejudiced society overrides all other experiences. What is evident is that we need more research on black girls' lives within the educational system in order to begin to answer these questions.

Social class, gender and race all affect girls experiences of school in complex ways. The reaction to a gender category can take the form of 'pro-school' conformity, or the appearance of such, or at the other extreme it can result in rejection of the school. The range of possible responses to school life is broad and is affected by a child's social origins. Although the research into girls' school culture is still at an early stage, it is nevertheless possible to see that the process of gender socialization is full of contradictions and the structures of sexism and racism impinge differently on different groups of girls. It is wrong to assume, therefore, that the school is totally successful in its preparation of girls into one definition of femininity or that it is systematically oppressive to all girls.

### Female Educational Achievement

Such educational experiences have their effect not just on girls' self-perception and identity but on their pattern of educational achievement. If we look in particular at girls' access to higher education, we can identify the impact of both sex differences and social class inequalities in educational achievement. (Unfortunately there are no comparable figures for race.)

The Robbins Report, published in 1963 is perhaps the best place to begin since it is one of the most important statements of state educational policy since the Second World War. What the Report assessed was the impact of the 1944 Education Act, which set up free, secondary education for all. It discovered the continuing depth of social inequality in so far as educational achievement and the distribution of access to higher education across different social classes and different sexes were concerned. It found that:

The proportion of young people who entered full-time higher education is 45 per cent for those whose fathers are in the 'higher professional' group, compared with only 4 per cent for those whose fathers are in skilled manual occupations. The underlying reasons for this are complex, but differences of income and the parents' educational level and attitudes are certainly among them. *The link is even more marked for girls than for boys.* (Robbins Report, p.51, vol. 1. Quoted in Silver, 1980, p.129; my emphasis.)

The class differences in educational attainment (defined by entry into higher education and, in particular, universities) were found to have changed



very little since the 1920s, despite the provision of free secondary education for all, and even though the proportion within each social class attaining higher education had steadily increased since the beginning of the century. The Robbins Report reaffirmed that social inequality in British society had remained a major obstacle to educational equality of opportunity. It confirmed the judgement of R.H. Tawney who wrote in 1931: 'The hereditary curse upon English education is its organization upon lines of social class' (p.142).

In the postwar period, Tawney's anger at what he called the 'barbarity' of an educational system that imposed differences of educational opportunities among children according to the differences of wealth among the parents had been reformulated into a more positive concern to provide 'equality of opportunity' for children of equal ability, irrespective of their social origins. The new ideological motto was *meritocracy*. The goal was to create a new society in which people were allocated their various occupational positions on the basis of their intelligence, ability, and aspirations. The resulting 'meritocratic order' would, it was thought, achieve both the desired results of greater economic efficiency through the maximization of human resources, and greater social cohesion through the socialization of all children into the value of social mobility. The capital investment demanded by the expansion of educational provision would be repaid in the greater productivity and reduced social conflict that it would ensure.

The goal of equality of opportunity led to a reorganization of education, which initially meant the setting up of the 11-plus test to sift out the school population according to ability levels. By the 1960s, it meant the abolition of the 11-plus test and the reorganization of the secondary school system into comprehensive schools, where children of all abilities and all social classes would be taught under one roof. In primary schools, the ideals of equality of opportunity produced a new 'progressive' ideology, where teachers were encouraged to treat all children according to their individual levels of creativity and needs. There was also an expansion of higher education and the provision of student grants for further study.

Yet have these reforms actually made a difference to the pattern of class and gender inequality that Robbins discovered? For the answer we have to look at the available educational statistics on class and gender and, in particular, at the statistics on educational achievement.

Table 1 shows the educational qualifications of adult males and females aged 20-69 who were economically active and were not in full-time education in 1977-78. The distribution of women in the various social classes is very different from that of men. But how do their educational qualifications compare within each social class?

The statistics show that although women were less likely than men to have reached degree level and were more likely to have no educational qualifications at all, a slightly higher proportion of women whose fathers were in social class 1 obtained a degree than men. This shows that the newly created opportunities for higher education tended to be taken up by women in the professional middle classes. In 1972 Kelsall, Poole and Kuhn confirmed



**Table 1** Highest educational qualifications by social class of males and females (Great Britain) (1977/1978)  
(Source: Based on Reid (1981) *Social Class Differences in Britain*, pp.207 and 208).

Qualification	Social class*/per cent											
	Non-manual occupations						manual occupations					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	ALL					
	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f
Degree or equivalent	60	67	10	7	11	4	φ	φ	1	φ	8	3
Higher educational below degree	20	12	15	13	13	15	4	2	1	1	8	8
GCE A-level or equivalent	9	3	10	4	13	4	8	2	3	1	8	3
GCE O-level or equivalent or CSE grade 1	4	6	18	15	20	19	12	9	7	4	13	13
CSE other grades/commercial/apprenticeship	1	2	10	11	7	16	20	8	9	5	13	12
Foreign and other	3	5	5	6	5	4	3	3	4	2	4	3
None	2	6	31	44	32	39	53	75	75	81	47	58
Total	7	1	16	5	18	50	41	8	15	27	100	100

\*See Note for social class groups.  
φ=less than 1 per cent.

that a greater proportion of female (67 per cent) than male (60 per cent) university graduates came from non-manual, middle-class occupations. In contrast only 14 per cent of female graduates had fathers in skilled work, and only 5 per cent had fathers in semiskilled and unskilled manual work, compared with 19 per cent and 7 per cent of male graduates respectively. The findings corroborated those of the Robbins Report which found that a higher percentage of women students (74 per cent) than male students (69 per cent) came from middle-class homes.

It is interesting to look briefly at another kind of educational development which might be expected to offer women and especially working class women, 'a second chance' to gain a higher education – the Open University. The Open University has since its foundation allowed many women to make up for their 'missed opportunities' and women students have responded by increasing their share of applications to join the university. In 1970 the proportion of applications from women was 30 per cent, by 1980 it had reached 45 per cent, with housewives accounting for about 40 per cent of all women applicants. By 1985, women represented 45 per cent of the university's undergraduate student population.

Most OU students work in higher-level white-collar occupations. Yet, by 1979, the proportion of the undergraduate population in lower-level white-collar occupations had risen from 14 per cent to 23 per cent, and that of manual workers from 5 per cent to 9 per cent. However, this increase in manual workers was almost entirely an increase in male students. Female manual workers are still badly represented. They account for around 2 per cent of the student intake, although around 23 per cent of the female workforce are in this group. In contrast, 61 per cent of the male working class represented by 13 per cent of the students. In terms of social class intake, therefore, the Open University has not made any real inroads into the problem of working-class women's low participation in higher education.

The reasons why some women do not take up the opportunities offered by the Open University are important since they indicate how women's role in society reinforces their disadvantaged educational position, which, in turn, reinforces their financial and social dependency on men. In 1977, for example, when applicants were asked why they had not taken up a place offered to them by the Open University, 62 per cent of women compared with 44 per cent of men gave 'non-work demands' as the reason for withdrawal from studying (e.g. social and domestic duties, care of children, moving home, new baby, death in the family, etc.). In contrast, the pressure of work, change of job, travel, etc. were reasons given by 43 per cent of the men but only 27 per cent of women. Personal and family commitments affected 30 per cent of all women and 50 per cent of all housewives. The lack of financial independence also affected 35 per cent of all women and 47 per cent of housewives, who could not afford even the relatively low cost of the Open University. Women's domestic and family commitments have, therefore, greatly affected their chances of taking up 'second chance' opportunities for higher education with the Open University (McIntosh, 1979).

Two further points should be made about the relationship between the



pattern of female achievement and the pattern of female employment. First, it is significant that even if women do achieve the same educational qualifications as men, there is no guarantee that the outcome, in terms of occupational level reached, will be the same. As Wolpe (1978) argues:

... even assuming that it were possible for women to replicate the training, in every way, that men received, it still would not follow that it would ensure them a place in the skilled world of work. Women would come into competition with men for the limited number of skilled jobs. Not only would the power of the male-dominated trade unions have to be reckoned with here but also the resistance of employers themselves, a resistance which is linked to structural elements. (Wolpe, 1978, p.161).

Secondly, there are major discrepancies in how men and women convert their education qualifications into income. Table 2 shows that, on average, women's earnings are 63 per cent of men's earnings and that the percentage decreases at the lower levels of educational qualification. Clearly not only is the pattern of female and male educational achievement different but so also is the value of educational qualifications for each sex.

**Table 2** Median annual earnings in 1978 of women as a percentage of men's\*. (Source: Reid, 1981, p.211, derived from General Household Survey 1978, 1980).

Degree or equivalent	76 per cent
Higher education below degree	75 per cent
GCE A-level or equivalent	65 per cent
GCE O-level or equivalent or CSE grade 1	61 per cent
CSE other grades/commercial/apprenticeship	65 per cent
None	61 per cent
All	63 per cent

\*Aged 20-69, employed for 31 hours or more per week.

### **Ideological aspects of state education policy**

The search for explanations of women's educational patterns has encouraged historians to trace the ideological assumptions underlying state educational provision. Sociologists, on the other hand, have focused on the shape of educational organization and classroom practices. Unfortunately the two analyses are rarely related together. In the next section I shall look at the processes within education which may have contributed to female patterns of achievement and female school cultures. But first I would like to consider the ways in which state education policy and its ideological assumptions have structured educational provision for girls and women and the assumptions made about girls' educational needs. It is state education policy that has, in my view, determined to a large extent the internal educational organisation and the attitudes of pupils and teachers to gender.

Understanding the nature and effect of state intervention and policy in any area is difficult to analyze at the best of times. This is especially the case since



the state is not an autonomous institution - many of its policies are a result of particular historical struggles and reflect the compromises reached by competing interest groups in different areas. State education policy derives to a large extent from an uneasy combination of policy decisions: from a combination of economic and political pragmatism and concessions to those groups the government wants to win or maintain the support of. In this context it is difficult to separate out the ways in which state education policy perpetuates the continuing power of dominant social classes and the continuing domination of black people by white people and of women by men. Further, the ways in which state ideologies are manifested in curriculum, school organization, in various types of teaching styles and assessment procedures are often diverse and contradictory and, as a result, the outcomes of schooling are to a certain extent unpredictable and contradictory. Therefore, even when we have identified the rationale for certain state policies, we have not necessarily explained the shape and the nature of state schooling or, indeed, its impact.

All these qualifications, however, do not mean that we can overlook the patterns of social inequalities in the state education system. To a certain extent the 'official ideology' of state educational legislation and the resulting pattern of educational provision must be examined as both causes and a reflection of, women's economic dependence on men and the continuance of social class and racial inequalities in society.

Historically, the ideology of state educational policy has, to a great extent, assumed that the education of girls should differ from that of boys. The benefits would accrue not just to individual girls and boys, but also to society, since it was assumed and still is assumed that education was designed to prepare people for adult life. And as adult life is sex-segregated it seemed only natural to devise an educational system that catered for a sex-segregated world. Although at certain points in the twentieth century a class-segregated world was seen as unjust, it was only by the late 1970s that a sex-segregated world appeared to contravene any sense of fairness. This is perhaps because in no other area has the reference to the 'natural', 'God-given' world been so prevalent. Since boys and girls could be shown to be physiologically different, why should they not also be socially and psychologically different?

The debate that evolved around the nature of girls' education in the nineteenth century is a complex debate with a complex history - only the barest outlines are touched on here. From the work of feminist historians we know that the issue of whether parents should educate their daughters or not was contentious and produced diverse responses. By the nineteenth century, many middle-class parents were involved in pressing for the setting up of small private girls' schools (Pederson, 1979). Further, the demand for girls' public boarding schools resulted in the establishment by the end of the nineteenth century of schools designed along similar lines to the famous boys' public schools. Yet, despite the rapidly increasing number of girls' boarding and day schools in that century, there was also considerable controversy over the 'educability' of girls, their brain power and the possible detrimental effects of educating girls into an 'academic' curriculum.



It was generally assumed that boys and girls should receive different educations, and there was an assumption that women of different social classes were expected to need and receive different types of schooling. The ideal to be produced by schools in the nineteenth century was one which 'rested in the prototype of the frail, protected woman of the middle classes' (Burstyn, 1980). Thus the hard physical stamina women of the working classes needed to carry out their work in the home and in paid employment was conveniently ignored.

A further contradictory aspect in the battle over women's education in the nineteenth century can be found in the desire, on the one hand, to have intelligent mothers of sons and, on the other hand, the desire not to educate them up to the level of men. Burstyn (1980) argues that in the nineteenth century educational planners saw the concept of the 'nation's' need as more important than women's own needs.

Intelligent women, unspoiled by education, produced eminent sons. The country would benefit far more from such men than from a similar number of sterile but educated women who might otherwise have produced them. 'Unsexed it might be wrong to call the educated woman, but she will be more or less sexless. And the human race will have lost those who should have been her sons. Bacon, for want of a mother, will not be born.'<sup>1</sup> Whereas education did not deprive men of their virility, and could prove useful in helping them to earn more money to support their families, it was likely to disable women reproductively. Intelligent, well-trained mothers were the ideal; how many eminent men had proclaimed their debt to their mothers. Moreover, educators claimed that the early years of childhood were more important than they had previously thought; the role of a mother in the education of her child was becoming more important than ever before. Spencer . . . claimed that parents' chief function with young children was to provide the conditions requisite for growth, and that this applied to the growth of children's minds as well as their bodies.<sup>2</sup> Intelligent mothers were needed to provide the kind of environment that would encourage mental development in their sons. An education that threatened to deplete the ranks of motherhood, and deny to it the most intelligent women, was as disastrous for the nation as for the women concerned. Every effort had to be made to get women to desist from their path of folly before it was too late. (p.95).

<sup>1</sup> Withers Moore (1886) in *The Lancet*, 2 p.315.

<sup>2</sup> H. Spencer (1860) *Education: Intellectual, Moral and Physical*, New York, p.108.

What is most striking in this quotation is the correlation between the 'nation's interest' and the needs of *male* children. By the late nineteenth century, references to the 'good of the nation', as far as women's child-rearing role was concerned, were to be heard more and more frequently. This was especially the case when it was discovered that men, called up to fight the Boer War, were physically unfit for conscription. Further, by the end of the nineteenth century, the infant mortality rate was still high and there was a low birthrate. There was an obsession, therefore, with the 'physical deterioration' of the population, which coincided with concern over the future of the Empire, 'national efficiency' and social standards of health, fitness, etc. Women were now being seen as a 'national asset', and their education was judged to be



necessary for the future of the country.

The impetus to educate women was directed not towards their membership of the paid workforce—as contributors to industrial wealth—but rather as *mothers* (not just wives) of future workers, soldiers and citizens. Even on the issue of training domestic servants, state policy makers were apparently reluctant to organize girls' elementary education specially for this means of independent survival. This was despite considerable pressure by the middle classes for working-class girls to receive domestic training so that they might become servants, and despite the fact that, until well into the twentieth century, domestic service was the single largest category of female paid employment. In 1911, B. L. Hutchins estimated that 34.8 per cent of 14-18-year-old employed girls were in domestic service (including hotel service, laundry and washing service) (quoted in Dyhouse, 1981, p.82). For many it was the only means of economic survival without marriage. By the early twentieth century, the concern by the middle classes for the 'servant problem' was the result not just of the declining numbers of working-class girls available and interested in entering service (especially since there were new employment opportunities available to them during and after the First World War) but about the quality of the new recruits to domestic service.

The compromise rhetoric of state policy makers was to stress that the curricula of elementary schools should 'fit girls for life'. Needless to say this meant that, over the course of the nineteenth century, domestically oriented special school subjects were introduced into elementary schools. In 1862, for example, needlework was made compulsory for girls in such schools. It acquired more than any other domestic subject 'symbolic importance' since 'proficiency with a needle implied femininity, it implied thrift' (Dyhouse, 1981, p.89). It was a subject that was said to appeal 'directly to the natural instincts of girls'. By 1875, pressure from associations such as the National Association for the Promotion of Housewifery led to the provision of grants for scholars to study other domestically oriented subjects and the adoption of such subjects was rapid and extensive:

The Code of 1878 made domestic economy a compulsory specific subject for girls. Between 1874 and 1882 the number of pupils studying domestic economy in the Board Schools rose from 844 to 59,812. Grants were first made available for teaching cookery in the Code of 1882, and for laundry work in 1890. In spite of various obstacles in the way of a speedy adoption of these subjects in some schools (the expense, for instance, of the necessary plant and equipment), the results of the grant being made available were quite impressive. According to a report on the progress of domestic economy teaching made to the Education Department in 1896, in 1882-3, 7,597 girls from a total of 457 schools had qualified for the cookery grant: by 1895-6 these numbers had risen to 134,930 and 2,729 respectively.<sup>1</sup> Between 1891-2 and 1895-6 the number of girls attending recognised classes in laundry work had similarly risen from 632 to 11,720: the number of schools offering these classes from 27 to 400 over the same period.<sup>2</sup> (Dyhouse, 1981, pp.89-90)

<sup>1</sup> Mrs Pillow 'Domestic Economy Teaching in England' (*Education Department Special Reports on Educational Subjects*), Vol. 1, HMSO, 1896-7, p.159.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p.167.



Thus, within the national system of state elementary schools established by the 1870 Education Act, the ideology of women's domesticity focused the curriculum of girls' education around their domestic futures as wives and mothers. It was a *domestic educational ideology*. Thus elementary schools offered a means of combining within *one* system of state education, *two* different models of schooling—one for boys and one for girls. And it was not just in the subject choices that differentiation between the sexes occurred.

The differential rate of attendance of girls and boys, for example, is often forgotten in accounts of the rise of mass schooling. It was considered appropriate for girls to be involved in domestic labour in the home, looking after younger children and the sick, or doing domestic chores. The low level of girls' attendance at school affected their literacy rate, which in the nineteenth century was lower than that of boys. This fact may have accounted for their higher attendance in adult evening classes, where they were still in search of basic reading and writing skills.

Further, within the early state schools, there was a differential stress on appearance, with neatness and cleanliness being considered more important for girls than for boys. Discipline and order problems were more commonly associated with boys. This emphasis distinguished the future careers of girls as housewives and mothers, who would eventually need to maintain a clean and tidy home and family, from the careers of boys in the 'public sphere' as wage workers.

The development of girls' education during the course of the nineteenth century was framed, therefore, not just in terms of female 'service' and dependency on men but also in terms of a recognized need to maintain a sexual division of labour by reproducing male and female separate spheres. The division between the public sphere of paid employment and the private sphere of family, through the work of the schools, was linked to the division of the sexes in such a way that the public sphere was seen as male and the private as female. Women, therefore, were not only defined as being 'home based' but were mainly prepared for the domestic sphere. The development of schooling was of key importance as one of the major agencies through which the division between public and private spheres was reinforced and associated with the men and women respectively.

### *Education for different social classes*

At the same time as *gender differentiation* was an explicit ideology of early forms of state education, so too was *social class differentiation*. The establishment of state elementary schools in the 1870 Education Act ran in parallel to, and did not challenge the existence of, private schools, where sons of the upper-middle classes were educated (most middle-class girls were still educated in the home by governesses unless they were sent to small private girls' schools). The setting up of secondary education also reinforced the pattern of social class differentiation: there was an assumption that different schools and different types of education should be provided for different social classes.



The Schools Enquiry Commission, called the Taunton Commission (1864), was perhaps the most significant landmark in the development of girls' secondary education. What the commission recommended were specially designed schools for each social class based on their future occupational roles. They also recommended that 'since the picture brought before us of the state of middle-class girls' education is on the whole unfavourable', good well-regulated day schools should be set up for girls in the principal towns. The preference, unlike that for boys, was to keep girls as close to home and their mothers as possible.

This report established that occupational differentiation was to be the ideology for the structure of boys' secondary education, and that girls' education was to be placed *alongside* and not *in* that hierarchical structure. In this sense, the 'vocational' ideology of schooling in the case of girls was not linked to waged work but to a domestic vocation. The Report of the Schools Enquiry Commission led directly to the establishment of high schools for girls and, in particular, to the formation of the Girls Public Day School Trust, which still exists today. This Trust developed the work of the National Union for Improving the Education of Women of all Classes, set up in 1871, and was noticeable in its efforts to recruit students from as wide a social range as possible. The Trust schools were to promote the establishment of good cheap girls' day schools for all social classes above those attending the elementary schools. By 1903, thirty-four such schools were established around the country. Also the Endowed School Act in 1869 made available funds for the setting up of girls' grammar schools, reflecting the new realization that the education of girls was as much a matter of public concern as that of boys, and that public funds must be allocated to it. The effect, therefore, of the Taunton Commission and the Endowed Schools Act was to add on to the boys' school system a parallel system of girls' secondary education. Two separate educational lines were established, each concerned with the different roles of men and women in each social class.

The development of female education obviously had a different impact on middle-class and on working-class women. On the one hand, education and the increasing work opportunities it offered, gradually gave middle-class women far more freedom and rather more chances to break away from their family situation than it gave their working-class sisters. It allowed them access, eventually, in the early twentieth century to university education and to the newly developed professions (such as nursing and teaching). It allowed them a certain degree of financial freedom as single women. For some working-class women, access to education gave them a chance to aspire to nonmanual occupations such as clerical and office work, and to take up jobs where basic literacy was required. However, the development of state education was also experienced by working-class women as a form of *class control* of themselves and their families. Ironically, the increasingly domestic role of women in the nineteenth century gave middle-class women a certain social power, in the sense that they were permitted to expand their activities outside the home and become 'missionaries' in their various efforts to educate the poor. As a result, the curricula offered to working-class girls in the charity



schools and private foundations transmitted specifically middle-class versions of what women's place should be and the middle-class concept of family form.

State elementary schools and mother-care training schemes also adopted this notion of family life for educating working-class girls. According to Davin (1979) the explanations for the development of state schooling offered so far have neglected this aspect of class control. Thus, to the extent that they focused on political or economic explanations of state schooling, they have not explained why girls were educated at all:

The *political* explanations . . . [offered for the rise of schooling refer to the need to combat] . . . the growing labour movement, in which women played no part at this time, and to the 1867 Franchise Act, which created a million or so new voters [who needed to be educated 'wisely']. [yet] none of them [were] women; while the *economic* context concerns the development of a new skilled and literate workforce (including a whole range of minor technicians significant in the expansion of empire and commerce as well as industry - telegraphists, sappers and signalmen as well as the more obvious draughtsmen, engineers and clerical workers) from which women (to begin with at least) were again absent. If such political and economic grounds had been the only reason for introducing general elementary education, one might well ask why girls were included at all. (p.89; my emphases and additions)

Davin argues that the educational requirements of maintaining women's place in the home was part of the perceived need of Victorian reformers to re-establish the family as a stabilizing force in the context of a society undergoing rapid industrialization, urbanization, and increasing social unrest. The 'failure' of the working-class family, in particular, was considered to have contributed to the growth of working-class militancy, subversion and violence, or even social apathy. Schools were, therefore, designed in such a way as to inculcate the values of the social order. They were designed to 'civilize' the working classes and 'bring the structure and organization of working-class family life into line with middle-class values and canons of "respectability" (Dyhouse, 1981, p.79).

However, within the broad pattern of female domestic ideology, class-specific ideals of femininity were also taught. Although middle-class girls were educated to become the 'perfect wife and mother', the ideal which the middle class imposed on the working-class girls was that of the 'good woman'. The middle-class girl was to learn the new ideal of femininity - which combined the Christian virtues (such as self-denial, patience and silent suffering), ladylike behaviour (refusing any paid or manual employment) and a ladylike etiquette (dress, style and manners); the working-class girl was to learn in essence what it meant to be a good housekeeper, wife and mother by being trained in the *practical* skills of domesticity, with no pretensions of becoming a lady. She would acquire enough conscience and ability to safeguard the family against crime, disease, immorality, and other social problems to which, in the eyes of the middle classes, the working classes appeared to be so prone (see Purvis, 1981).



The development of state education as it unfolded – with its transmission of the values and standards of the middle classes – had different effects and meanings, therefore, for the families of the middle and working classes. Miriam David (1980) has outlined in detail the changing relations of the families of different social classes to the educational authorities and the central policy-making structure. She sums up the effects of the events of the nineteenth century:

By 1900 the relationships between parents and children, and between parents and the state, over schooling were entirely changed from the beginning of the century. Parents were no longer solely responsible for their children. But different classes of parent had different responsibilities: working-class parents had to submit their children to education and, in return, were required to behave in particular ways towards them before, during and after schooling. In particular, rearing was becoming more professionalised, and mothers were having demands made upon them. Children were also shown their position and future place in the social order. Increasingly, developments were made in vocational education, to ensure children a more precisely delineated place in the social hierarchy. Upper- and upper-middle-class parents were not required to reach the same standards as working-class parents. Even at the end of the century the employment of servants and tutors to care for young boys and girls remained the norm. These parents were only expected to obtain the adequate upbringing of their children, especially their sons. (p.41)

Obviously the removal of children from the labour force and from the home during the day by the end of the nineteenth century had considerable effect on family relations and the household income. In many ways the development of schools represented a major incursion by the state into family life, and signified the 'taking' on by the state of the role of parents. The state acted, in so far as the education of children was concerned, in place of parents (i.e. in *loco parentis*), assuming the responsibility for the training, supervision and the instilling of discipline and order in the next generation and, as Davin (1979) argues, a new generation of parents:

Education was to form a new generation of parents (and especially mothers) whose children would not be wild, but dependent and amenable, accepting not only the obvious disciplines of school and work but also the less visible constraints at the bottom of the heap. Education was to establish (or as they believed to re-establish) the family as a stabilizing force. (p.90)

The development of girls' education in the twentieth century reveals many of the same assumptions of class and gender differentiation that were prevalent in the nineteenth century. However, in the period after the First World War it had become less and less feasible to talk openly about providing different educations for different social classes. The new rhetoric stressed differences in individual ability, needs and interests, rather than different social class 'needs'. As a result, it became more difficult to recognize the principle of class differentiation at work in the structure of education. Far easier to see is the way in which the development of state secondary schooling incorporated an ideology of gender differentiation.

Even in the period immediately after the 1944 Education Act when



secondary education for all was established and an ideology of equality of opportunity framed educational thinking and planning, girls' education was similar to that of previous decades. The importance of relating girls' schooling to their future role as mothers was emphasized and supported not just by educational policies but also by social policy. Nurseries set up during the war were shut down and women were encouraged to see their primary responsibilities as home makers, even if they had paid employment.

In the fifties and sixties, the concept of 'dual careers', of being 'equal but different' was promoted, particularly amongst the middle classes (see Birmingham Feminist History Group, 1979). The Crowther Report (1959) recognized that middle class girls would be interested in combining a career with motherhood but working-class girls were still to be educated largely for their domestic role, even if they were more likely to be found in employment in adult life.

Looking at three major education reports produced since the 1940s (the Norwood Report, 1943, the Crowther Report, 1959, and the Newsom Report, 1963), Wolpe (1976) shows that despite major economic changes and shifts in the position of women in society, all three had similar assumptions. First, boys and girls differed in their needs and interests, especially because of girls' future role as wives and mothers and boys' alleged interest in becoming wage earners. Second, each revealed an uncritical acceptance of the dominant cultural values of how the sexes should live together, and third, each took hardly any account of the concrete facts of female employment and women's economic position. By stressing female domesticity as women's primary functions, Wolpe suggests that each contributed in its own way 'to produce an adaptable, pliable and docile female labour source with only marginal skills'.

By the 1960s, secondary schooling was undergoing radical reform through the movement to set up comprehensives; yet even here it was not clear that girls would benefit from the new organization. Deem (1981) argues that the curriculum within these schools tended to mean providing shorthand, typing and child-care classes for working-class girls, and a different range of crafts for boys. Middle-class girls, on the other hand, could benefit from the opportunities offered by the new non-selective schools to take formal examinations and later go on to higher education.

By the end of the sixties however the contradictions and tensions of women's dual roles were beginning to be discussed more publicly. New demands were being made for women's rights to an equal education and equal treatment within schools. This movement was reflected in the passing of the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975 which made it unlawful to discriminate on grounds of sex in education, as well as in employment and training. Although not very effective as a means of reforming educational practice, the presence of such legislation and the promotional work of the EOC drew attention to issues such as the lack of scientific education for girls and the limited patterns of female subject choice, particularly in secondary schools. Feminist teachers also began to develop their own schemes to analyze existing curricular materials and teaching practice and what has been called the 'hidden curriculum' of schooling (i.e. the informal processes and procedures



of educational institutions). And in some schools, projects were started to reform radically both pupils' and teachers' perceptions about sexual divisions and sexism and to change the level of girls' participation and their subject choices. By the end of the seventies concern about girls' education focussed on demands, not just for equal access to educational facilities, but for equal outcomes of schooling.

Gradually central government and some local authorities have started to investigate and make recommendations to improve girls' education. However, the emphasis has been limited on the whole to improving girls' education in scientific and technological subjects. Rather less attention has been paid to restructuring the relations between the sexes and explicitly tackling the problems of sexism. Social policy, meantime, continues to reinforce the family division of labour and to assume that it should be women who are the main domestic workers and carers (see David, 1984).

Summing up the period 1940 to the 1980s Deem (1981) argues that most of the advances achieved by women, both inside and outside education, can be linked to periods of full employment and to the implementation of social democratic policies and ideology, and suggests that, in understanding how women have benefited or become disadvantaged by educational policies, we have to recognize that the 'treatment of women in education has been closely linked to other social policies and to prevalent ideologies about women's roles' (p.141). One cannot, therefore, separate out educational policies for women, from women's involvement in the paid labour force and their family responsibilities.

The state education system has played a major role in the 'reproduction' (in the sense of continual production and maintenance) of a society divided by class, race and gender. As a result there is a tension between the role of education as a means of female liberation and its role in the *imposition* of a middle-class, white male culture. It is inadequate, therefore, to see educational provision *either* as a form of social control *or* as a form of liberation. What makes an educational system so complex is that potentially it can fulfil both these functions at one and the same time, and in different ways for different classes, sexes and ethnic groups.

#### *State training policy and women's work*

The pattern of educational achievement has changed over time, and girls have improved their qualifications on leaving school, particularly in gaining 'O' levels and some 'A' levels. Table 3 shows that in the last ten years a higher proportion of girls have taken degree courses, although the proportion of boys on these courses is still higher than the percentage of girls. Both sexes have been affected by the cutting back of educational opportunities in the early 1980s. The reduction of female teacher training students is particularly noticeable in the last decade.

The types of further training that girls receive, needless to say, are different from those of boys. Whereas full-time and sandwich courses attract an equal percentage of boys and girls, far more male students than female students can be found on part-time day-release courses. Women tend to



Table 3 Destination of school leavers in England & Wales: by sex  
(Source: *Social Trends*, 1984, Central Statistical Office.)

	BOYS				GIRLS			
	1970/ 71	1975/ 76	1980/ 81	1982/ 83	1970/ 71	1975/ 76	1980/ 81	1982/ 83
Pupils entering full-time further and higher education as a percentage of all school leavers - by type of course								
Degree	9.0	8.8	9.3	8.5	5.3	5.4	6.8	6.5
Teacher training	1.3	0.5	0.2	0.1	5.2	2.2	0.7	0.6
HND/HNC	0.7	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
OND/ONC	0.6	0.9	0.4		0.4	0.5	0.1	
GCE 'A' level	1.6	1.8	2.8	3.2	1.1	2.1	3.3	3.6
GCE 'O' level	1.7	1.5	1.7	1.6	1.1	1.5	2.2	2.0
Catering	4.7	0.5	0.6	0.7	10.8	1.0	1.7	1.8
Nursing		-	-	-		1.6	1.9	1.8
Secretarial		-	-	-		4.8	5.2	4.3
Other full-time		4.5	6.6	8.2		6.0	9.6	10.9
Total pupils entering full-time education (percentages)	19.5	18.9	22.2	23.0	24.1	25.4	32.0	31.8
Total school leavers seeking employment on leaving school (percentages)	80.5	81.1	77.8	77.0	75.9	74.6	68.0	68.2

predominate on other part-time day and evening courses. The Manpower Services Commission Training Services Division Report (1976) revealed that in 1974 only 10 per cent of girls compared with 40 per cent of boys under eighteen years old took day-release courses. This report also pointed out that women were less likely to receive in-service training and retraining later in their working life. For example, in clerical jobs, 40.5 per cent of women and 7 per cent of men were given no training.

Another aspect of differential training patterns of boys and girls can be found in their level of participation in different *types* of courses. The Equal Opportunities Commission (1978/9) reported that in 1975 only 8000 women were on further education courses in engineering and technology compared with 42500 men. Also, even though women constituted 35.4 per cent of undergraduate students on full-time university courses, they were unevenly distributed across the different subject specializations. In 1975, women made up 68.4 per cent of those studying education; 62.4 per cent of those taking language and literature, and area studies, and 52.2 per cent of students in Arts subjects (other than languages), compared with only 30 per cent of those studying science subjects and 4 per cent of engineering and technology students. Women are also underrepresented on professional and vocational courses such as medicine, dentistry and health, veterinary science, business studies, etc.



The impact of this pattern of training is obvious if one looks at where women are found in the paid employment. Not only are most women concentrated in stereotypical female jobs, but even when women have received an advanced training (for example at a university) they are still found clustered in a limited range of occupations. The majority of female graduates find their first employment in public service jobs, particularly in local government, health authorities, and education. Only 35 per cent of female graduates entered industry and commerce in 1975, compared with 62 per cent of male graduates. Why is this the case? Why do men and women have such different training patterns and eventual employment? Is it because the state has deliberately created this difference? Or is it because the state has neglected to help women break away from the discrimination and limitations of a sex-segregated labour market?

Ann Wickham (1985) argues that state training policies have changed over time and there were occasions when the problems of women's specific training needs were recognized. However, reports and recommendations were seldom acted upon. The intervention of the state in providing training for work and in particular for skilled work has been inadequate and prejudicial as far as women were concerned. As Phillips and Taylor (1980), put it 'skilled work has become almost by definition work that women do not do'. Wickham argues that it is only in recent times that the redefining of the concept of skill to include such notions as attitudes to work, social and communication skills has opened up possibilities for the entry of women into training courses and jobs in different work spheres. Training contributes to, but does not determine, women's place in the labour market. Yet even here state training policies have failed to challenge the notion that women's place is still primarily as wives and as dependants of men.

The opening up of training courses such as the Training Opportunities Programme (TOPS) by the Manpower Services Commission has led to an increase in women students. However, this again has not shifted them away from primarily female subjects: in 1980/81 women represented 97 per cent of students on shorthand and typing courses, 88 per cent on clerical courses, and 74 per cent on hairdressing and cleaning, whereas only 0.5 per cent were on construction and welding courses, and 1 per cent on metal making and engineering courses.

In 1983 the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) replaced the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP) and constructed new divisions between employer-based courses (Mode A) and training workshops (Mode B). Girls represented some 44 per cent of Mode A schemes and 35 per cent of Mode B courses by the end of 1983. However, as Wickham (1985) has found 'all the signs suggest that exactly the same patterns (of sex stereotyping) are repeating themselves and exactly the same excuses made'. Careers' advisers, YTS managers and employers do not seem to be encouraging and helping girls to move into 'non-traditional' areas, even though the MSC at times publicly acknowledges the desirability of this goal. Interviews with a sample of young people on YTS schemes revealed the following distributions of girls and boys across the different occupational training families (OTFs):



Table 4 Percentage of girls and boys in occupational training families (OTFs) in the YTS (Published January 1985)  
(Source: *The Class of '84*, The Fawcett Society and National Joint Committee of Working Women's Organizations 1985)

OTF	Male per cent	Female per cent
Admin/Clerical	7	35
Agriculture	6	2
Craft and Design	4	1
Maintenance	24	1
Technical/Scientific	2	1
Manufacturing	16	5
Processing	1	1
Food Preparation	4	5
Sales/Personal Service	8	29
Community/Health	1	8
Transport	2	0
More than 1 OTF	1	0
Unclassified	23	13

The recent verbal commitment to increasing women's opportunities through new training programmes has not therefore turned into a reality. Wickham argues that state policies have been concerned primarily with men and their needs. State training programmes have thus contributed to, rather than challenged, the existing social divisions within the occupational structure.

### Educational organisation and girls' achievement

In contrast with the analysis presented so far which identifies the origins of female educational disadvantages in the ideological assumptions of state education and training policy and provision, is the 'official' view represented for example, by the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Equal Opportunities Commission. Here there is a tendency to find the 'causes' of sex inequalities within the educational system itself, particularly the attitudes of those most involved in it—for example parents, pupils and teachers. For many educationalists, the problem of gender inequality is an *educational problem* for which an *educational solution* can be found. Sex discrimination is therefore defined as the problem of ignorance or 'conventional' attitudes which can be tackled through the prevention of unlawful behaviour and educational reform. From such a perspective the history of state provision and its ideological assumptions and structures appear to be largely an irrelevance.

The search for explanations of why some people hold biased or stereotypical attitudes has led to an interest in the processes of learning in the family and school system, and many of the suggested reforms have focussed on



changes in these areas. The following sections will consider some of the factors which might be involved. I shall look in particular at four areas; (a) childhood experiences (b) school organization (c) mixed versus single sex schools and (d) classroom practice.

### *Childhood experiences*

A variety of theories of gender development have been used to explain the ways in which children acquire their concepts of gender, gender identity and gender role. Psychoanalytic theory and cognitive development and social learning theories are the most important ones and have been much debated by psychologists. (For a good summary see Kessler and McKenna, 1982). It is not relevant here to go into the intricacies of this theoretical, and somewhat inconclusive, debate; instead I shall focus on the sociological research on patterns of gender socialization found in British society today. Such research has concentrated on the many cultural influences on the child, which may reinforce or contradict the messages received from its parents. These influences feed into the child's later school experiences.

Research such as Sara Delamont's (1980) shows the number of different ways children can be taught to recognize at a very early age a gender classification system and to use this classification system to label their environment accordingly. She points to the significance of boys' and girls' names, their clothes, the different colours used in the nursery, etc., all of which are cultural artifacts that discriminate between the sexes.

Glenys Lobban (1985), after looking at sex roles in the reading schemes used in infant and primary schools in 1974 and 1975 in Britain, summarized her research as follows:

In our society more than half the population is female yet a child who took her view of reality from these schemes could be forgiven for concluding that females were in a distinct minority and that those females who do exist are intrinsically inferior to, and less worthy of mention than, males. (p.206)

In the reading schemes Lobban studied (the *Pirates* schemes and the *Language in Action* scheme), the overall ratio of male heroes to female heroines was five to one. Together, the two schemes showed 33 adult male occupations with only 8 female occupations (mum, granny, handywoman, princess, queen, witch, teacher and shop assistant). No children's reader showed the mother going out to paid employment. She concluded, therefore, that the world of work appeared to be even more male dominated than it really was, and this would only depress the aspirations of female children.

Similarly, in a survey of toy catalogues, Delamont (1980) found that the world of toys and games offered girls a far more restricted and domestic range of roles than boys. Girls were encouraged to be essentially passive, home-centred, nonscientific, nontechnical and 'good'. Whereas boys were offered the exciting roles of Robin Hood, a big-game hunter, spacemen, Dracula, cowboys and Indians, girls were limited to Miss World and being a ballerina. The variety offered to girls consisted of a range of domestic roles such as cleaning, cooking, sewing and shopping



Yet, surprisingly, despite such forms of cultural imposition of traditional images of a woman's role, little girls can and do succeed academically, particularly in the early years of childhood. In the home, where from early childhood the differences between boys and girls may be emphasized, little girls nevertheless can benefit from their sedentary and passive activities, close to their mothers. On average, they develop, unlike boys, an early proficiency at language and reading skills; they develop a verbal fluency that excels that of boys. In preschool years, girls also tend to score higher on general intelligence tests than boys and, up to the age of 12, girls are equal to boys in arithmetical computation. Paradoxically, the availability of models of femininity in the mother and female primary-school teacher, as well as what has been called the 'feminine atmosphere' of the home and early school life, may also encourage female academic success. The mother and the primary-school teacher may operate stereotypical sex distinctions, and thus praise girls for their greater tidiness, quietness and obedience. In this environment, a girl, by conforming to notions of femininity, may also be conforming to one notion of a 'good pupil' and vice versa. What she may lose, however, is a training that encourages originality and experimentation and physical rough and tumble. Boys, on the other hand, by resisting the teacher or their mother, learn a certain degree of assertiveness and initiative, which may benefit them in later school life.

As the child grows up, children's literature, television and other cultural influences, (such as those of its peer group,) reinforce the differences of concepts of masculinity and femininity. In particular, girls are presented with a definition of femininity that is closely connected with a subordinate position in a male-centred world. For example, in *Jackie*, the schoolgirl magazine, teenage female sexuality is constructed in such a way as to reinforce female subordination.

Romance problems, fashion, beauty and pop mark out the limits of the girl's concern - other possibilities are ignored or dismissed.

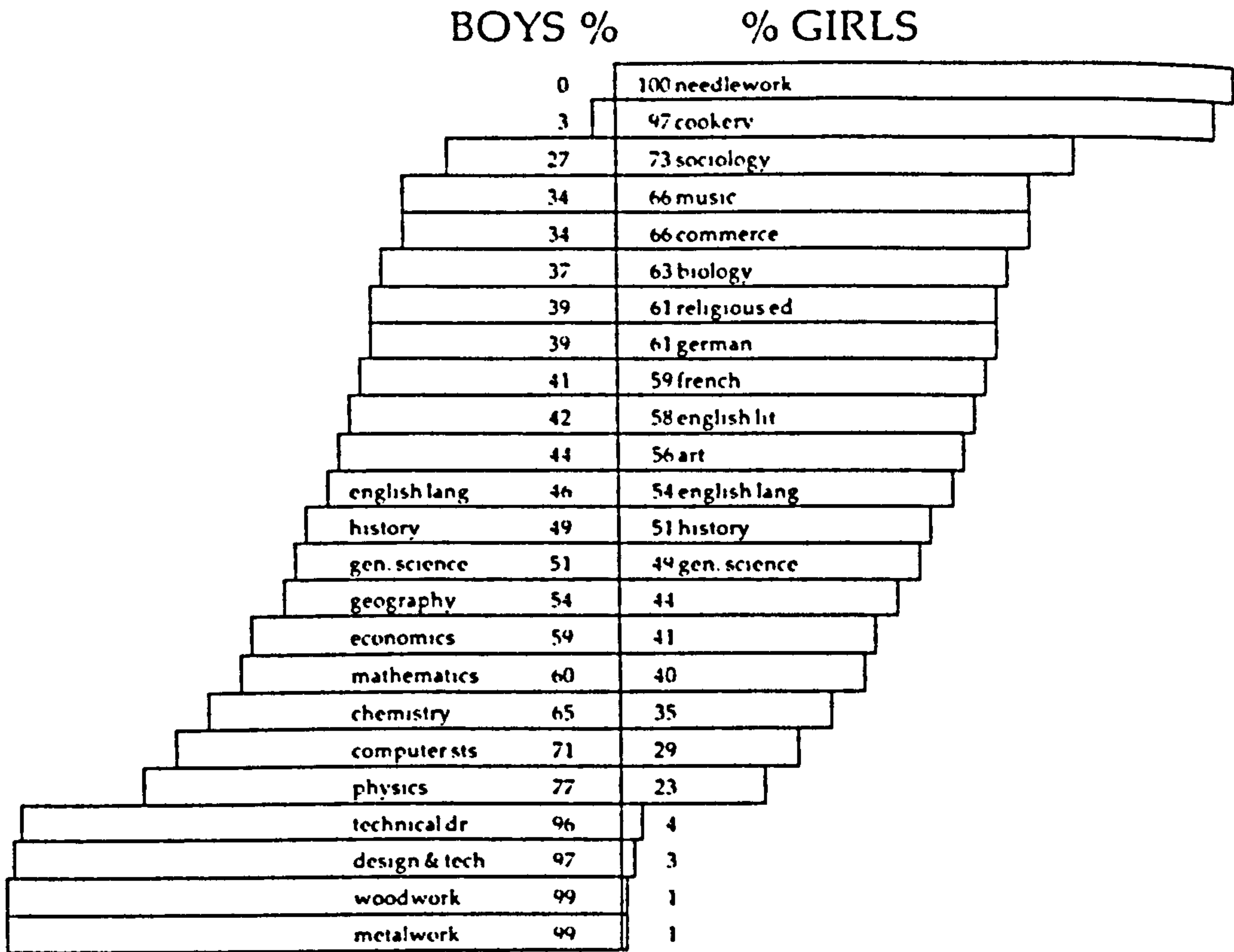
... The *Jackie* girl is alone in her quest for love; she refers back to her female peers for advice, comfort and reassurance *only* when she has problems in fulfilling this aim. Female solidarity, or more simply the idea of girls together - in *Jackie* terms - is an unambiguous sign of failure. To achieve self-respect, the girl has to escape the 'bitchy', 'catty' atmosphere of female company and find a boyfriend as fast as possible. But in doing this she has not only to be individualistic in outlook - she has to be prepared to fight ruthlessly - by plotting, intrigue and cunning, to 'trap her man'. Not surprisingly this independent-mindedness is short-lived. As soon as she finds a 'steady', she must renounce it altogether and capitulate to *his* demands, acknowledging his domination and resigning herself to her own subordination. (McRobbie, 1978b, p.50)

In discussing these various forms of cultural *imposition* of gender stereotypes, we must be careful not to forget the various responses of boys and girls to these stereotypes, and to the message of parents and peer-group cultures. We must be aware that girls can negotiate the dominant definitions of femininity at a very early age, not just in schools.



*School organization*

Secondary schooling and further education obviously play a vital role in shaping girls' image of themselves and their future. The qualifications that individual students receive in these institutions are critical to their eventual training and placement in the occupational hierarchy. Yet in Table 5 below we can see there are major differences between the subjects entered at GCE 'O' level by boys and girls. This pattern is reflected at CSE as well as 'A' level and higher education courses selected.



**Table 5** GCE 'O' level entries Summer 1980 *Source:* Harding, J (1982) 'C.D.T. what's missing?' *Studies in Design Education, Craft and Technology* Vol. 15, No. 1, winter. Department of Education, University of Keele, Staffordshire. ST5 5BG.

One of the most critical aspects of this pattern is the fact that girls do not generally study science or technological subjects, in further education, or at university. This avoidance or lack of interest in scientific subjects on the part of girls is an issue that has concerned the EOC and a range of government departments. In 1977, for example, the Manpower Services Commission argued that there was a need to teach 'mathematical, scientific and technical knowledge, enabling boys and girls to learn the essential skills needed in a fast-changing world of work' (quoted in Wolpe, 1978, p.150). Girls, it argued, should 'broaden and modernize their aspirations and . . . feel confident of success, in unfamiliar fields of science and technology'. In 1980, this concern for girls' involvement in science led the DES to produce a report specifically on



Explaining girls' failure to choose science is now an industry in itself, especially since 1984 was declared WISE (Women into Science and Engineering) year by the EOC. Alison Kelly (1981, 1982) has put forward a variety of different explanations for why girls don't do science – such as their lack of self confidence, the masculine image of science and the impersonal approach to science which do not relate easily to girls' previous experiences and interests. Such research, however, illustrates the more general problems which girls face, particularly within secondary schools. Broader political questions are now being asked as to whether there is in fact genuine 'equality of opportunity' for boys and girls to choose and take all school subjects so that any differences in their patterns of school-subject choice reflects genuine 'free choice' and genuine differences of boys' and girls' interests. The dominant ideology of state policy by the mid-twentieth century has been that boys and girls of any social class are indeed 'free' to choose; in the school they will be encouraged to follow their own independently made decisions as to the nature of their education, their interests and futures.

However, in order for this ideology of free choice to work, two conditions must be satisfied – all children must have *equal access* to all forms of curriculum subjects, and all school experiences and careers advice must be 'neutral'. If these two conditions can be achieved, the resulting pattern of educational choice can be described as reflecting student choice and the 'distribution of natural interests' without regard to social class or ethnic origins or gender.

In the 1960s, the programme for school reorganization in the form of comprehensive schools enshrined such an educational goal. The assumption was that these schools would reduce the impact of social inequalities on subject provision and choice by placing all children in the *same* schools. All children in these new schools would be offered the chance to take all subjects.

Yet, despite the principles and the ideals behind comprehensive schools, the reality was different, as Benn and Simon (1972) found when they investigated these schools. They discovered a number of factors that inhibited student choice *inside the school*; for example, the traditional pattern of gender differentiation (particularly in the area of curricula timetabling and provision) was being reproduced in the new comprehensive schools. Fifty per cent of all mixed schools admitted to limiting some subjects to boys only and 49 per cent limited some subjects to girls only (e.g. catering, nursing, pottery, hygiene, jewellery-making, domestic science and dancing). There were a dozen subjects not open to boys, and over a dozen not open to girls.

Such arbitrary subject provision inevitably had a considerable impact upon the patterns of educational qualifications received by boys and girls. Benn and Simon's conclusion from their research was that real freedom of subject choice for both sexes does not just happen – it must be 'actively organized'. However, the active organization of equality of school-subject provision is not an easy task, especially when schools have limited resources and only a certain number of places available to students to study specialist courses. Under



pressure from the Sex Discrimination Act and the Manpower Services Commission's Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative (TVEI) schools are now being encouraged to find ways of challenging the traditional stereotyping of boys and girls and to offer them genuine access to the same curricula subjects. This, however, had led to various interpretations of the problem. For example, one can assume that genuine equality of opportunity is achieved when precisely equal numbers of boys and girls are found taking the same subject? Would a ratio of 6:4 be sufficient to represent equality? What does equality of provision and choice actually look like? If schools offered all students the chance to study the same subjects, but male and female pupils still chose stereotypical subjects, can the school be held responsible? A genuine 'free-for-all' in terms of subject choice does not necessarily lead to genuine equality since it is still likely – given traditional assumptions about men's and women's place in society – to lead to stereotypical choices: to some 'all-male' subjects, oversized groups, under-used facilities, etc., or to all students doing all craft subjects in rotation and the staff feeling that they never do their subject for long enough to get full benefit from it.

The Equal Opportunities Commission's initial view (although later retracted) was that the vast majority of cases of sex discrimination occur *by default* rather than by intent, especially since educators are often unaware of their own deeply held discriminatory attitudes. This view was also supported by the DES (1975) in *Curricular Differences for Boys and Girls*, which reported the findings of the HM Inspectorate, who investigated maintained primary, middle and secondary schools in England and Wales. They revealed the extent of gender differentiation practised in schools, which resulted from the assumption that boys and girls had different interests, abilities and futures. Children of different sexes were prepared for different roles in adult life and were encouraged to expect gender differentiation as normal. Teachers considered that such differentiation was not for academic reasons, but because it was 'normal practice, a part of a convenient long-standing organization. The most important effect of such 'normal' practices was found in the pattern of boys' and girls' curricula – the subjects they were offered, those they chose to study, and those taken by boys and by girls for examination.

However, the significant revelation of this report was that what appeared to be important in affecting the choice of school subjects was whether the school was mixed or single sex – it is to this which we shall now turn.

### *Mixed versus single sex schools*

The looseness of the school reform programme during the 1960s and after, which aimed to set up comprehensive schools, meant that a range of possible school structures were permitted. In general though, the reforms meant the development of state coeducational schools, even though there was no real debate on the repercussions of mixed schools for pupils. It was assumed that coeducation was a 'good thing' – that by bringing both sexes into the same physical building, inequality of the sexes (comparable to the inequality of



social classes) would be reduced. As a result, by 1975, some 87 per cent of comprehensive schools in the state sector in England and Wales were mixed and, in contrast, 74 per cent of grammar schools were single sex. The distribution of mixed-sex and single-sex schools differed in each local educational authority since some authorities decided to offer only co-educational schools, others chose mainly mixed-sex schools leaving a few single-sex schools, others offered mainly single-sex schools. In Scotland, secondary schools were virtually all mixed. By 1978 the majority of schools in the maintained sector in the United Kingdom were mixed; in contrast with this pattern, 1046 independent schools were single sex out of 2220 such schools.

The importance of the distribution of single-sex or mixed-sex schools was high-lighted by the DES (1975) in *Curricular Differences for Boys and Girls*. They discovered that secondary school curricular options were often either purposely or unintentionally segregated for boys and girls, which had the effect of clustering girls primarily in the art subjects and leaving boys in the majority in the hard sciences such as chemistry and physics, and that this pattern of subject provision was affected by the 'sex structure' of schools. Although girls were more likely to be offered a science subject in mixed-sex schools, they were less likely actually to choose and take that subject in such schools. Thus the DES discovered that the provision of school subjects at secondary level did not mean that the subject was chosen; what did affect choice was the absence or presence of the opposite sex. Table 6 below shows why they came to this conclusion.

The impact of single-sex schools was also felt at A-level, when the report argued that 'any correlation between the sex of the pupil and the popularity of a subject is markedly greater in mixed schools than in single-sex schools' (p.16). The tendency, therefore, of single-sex schools was to weaken the traditional patterns of subject choice, particularly in the case of girls taking science subjects. However, what the DES survey also discovered (which seems to have been neglected by most commentators) is that the provision made for craft and practical subjects—subjects thought more suitable for the less academically able—followed traditional patterns in almost all cases in single-sex schools, with more chance of 'progressive' practice in mixed schools. As Eileen Byrne has pointed out, single-sex education—because of its total lack of access of girls to handicrafts and boys to homecraft—has had important vocational effects. Domestic economy for girls has meant focusing on cookery or needlework, whereas for boys handicrafts has involved woodwork, metalwork and technical drawing. Yet, she argues, these two sets of craft studies are not equivalent. 'Cookery has very little educative transfer value and is mainly skills based with a low conceptual element. Except for the rare few who study catering it has little relevance to the world of work and is not properly *technical* education' (Commission of the European Communities, 1978, p.41). Also, needlework is taught to pupils so that they can do dressmaking and domestic sewing. In contrast, the courses that boys take give them at least some provisional technical education. Furthermore, technical craft courses reinforce spatial development and numerical concepts in boys.



Table 6 Options in the fourth and fifth forms: pupils being offered, choosing and taking particular subjects (corrected percentages for comparing segregated and mixed schools) (1975) (Source: Department of Education and Science (1975), p.13)

		<i>Being offered</i>		<i>Choosing</i>		<i>Taking</i>	
		<i>per cent of totals of pupils</i>		<i>per cent of those to whom offered</i>		<i>per cent of totals of pupils</i>	
		<i>single-sex schools</i>	<i>mixed schools</i>	<i>single-sex schools</i>	<i>mixed schools</i>	<i>single-sex schools</i>	<i>mixed schools</i>
Physics	boys	85	91	60	52	51	47
	girls	62	75	23	15	14	11
Chemistry	boys	81	79	36	35	29	28
	girls	75	78	27	22	20	17
Biology	boys	79	91	39	30	31	27
	girls	96	96	49	53	47	51
French	boys	75	87	37	28	28	24
	girls	92	90	49	43	45	39
German	boys	33	36	21	11	7	4
	girls	44	38	18	21	8	8
Geography	boys	91	61	55	54	50	33
	girls	72	61	53	46	38	28
History	boys	92	57	45	40	41	23
	girls	69	61	46	48	32	29
Art	boys	97	98	36	38	35	37
	girls	98	98	39	37	38	36
Music	boys	55	75	11	13	6	10
	girls	94	81	16	16	15	13

Yet it is precisely these skills that girls, given their early deprivation need to acquire in this respect.

Despite the evidence that girls and boys received less stereotyped ‘academic’ education in single-sex schools, the DES survey did not argue that boys and girls should be educated separately or together. The HM Inspectorate stated categorically that the ‘findings would be misinterpreted if used to argue the case for either single-sex or mixed schools’; instead they advised a reconsideration of the curricula provision for 12–16-year-olds to ensure that ‘the principal areas of the curriculum are open to all boys and girls in whatever kind of school they happen to be’ (p.22).

The report’s hesitancy to recommend single-sex schools may have been a result of the other findings of their report. Curricular provision and choice was determined to a considerable extent by the *type of secondary school*. In their appendices, the DES report showed that physics was offered to 90–100



per cent of grammar school girls (mixed and single sex) but only 37 per cent of mixed secondary modern and 11 per cent of single-sex secondary modern school girls. Whereas 33 per cent of girls in single-sex grammar schools and 29 per cent of mixed grammar schools actually took physics, a paltry 3 and 4 per cent of girls in mixed and single-sex secondary modern schools did. The type of secondary school attended was critical, therefore, to the pattern of subject provision and choice, especially in high status 'academic' school subjects.

Class differences in the types of pupil recruitment also make a difference. For example, single-sex schools were found by Douglas and Ross (1966) to be an advantage for middle-class boys, and for boys and girls of the manual working classes who attended grammar schools: they stayed on longer and got better O-level results. Middle-class girls, on the other hand, were at a considerable advantage in mixed grammar schools, perhaps because girls' single-sex grammar schools were underresourced and the curricular options were limited. In the secondary modern schools, the 'sex structure' of the school made little difference to middle-class boys and the working-class pupils; again middle-class girls did better in mixed schools. This study could not examine the effect of mixing in comprehensive schools.

More recent studies have managed to compare different types of schools, different levels of pupil ability and girls' experiences in mixed and single sex comprehensives, modern, technical and grammar schools. Steedman's (1983) and Bone's (1983) research, report that there seem to be no intrinsic advantages or disadvantages, in terms of academic performance, for girls in mixed or single sex schools. The type of school and the style of the school they found to be a more important feature of girls' experiences. Girls seemed more favourable to 'non-traditional' areas in single sex schools, although they were not necessarily encouraged by the schools to go ahead and challenge the feminine stereotype.

Support for coeducational schools was presented in the major study of single-sex and mixed schools—that of R.R. Dale (1969, 1971, 1974), published in three volumes. Dale stressed the *social* advantages of coeducation since, by mixing the sexes, schools could in his view more effectively reproduce what he called 'normal life', i.e. life in a two-gendered and heterosexual world in which men dominate and women learn to complement and subordinate themselves to men. In mixed schools, boys and girls could get to know each other; they were more likely to avoid the extremes of character defects such as the 'aggression' of boys and the 'cattiness' and 'bitchiness' of girls. In the happy family atmosphere of such schools, teachers would use less harsh discipline and less physical force.

Dale stressed the social advantages for boys of mixed schools and ignored the social disadvantages which girls face in such schools. Yet these disadvantages affect girls' low perception of themselves and their worth, in comparison with boys. And as Alison Kelly has argued, it is difficult to separate out the effects of lack of self-confidence with the lack of academic ambition. Mixed schools in many ways are boys' schools with girls in them and, as Jenny Shaw (1974, 1980) has argued, the deterioration of girls' academic performance and their limited horizons in the choice of school



subject in mixed secondary schools are linked to a school climate in which most senior staff are male and where there is overall anxiety about appropriate gender behaviour. The use of gender in mixed schools to categorize pupils, to organize their daily activities, their examination results, their school dress or uniform, their play activities, etc., as well as separate staffrooms for male and female staff, all have the effect of reinforcing the differences rather than the similarities between the sexes.

In contrast, away from the pressures of male pupils, girls may get the impression that it is important whether they do well academically at school and that the 'male' world of science is potentially assailable. As a result of the research on mixed schools, single-sex schools are now seen as the way forward by some feminists. Such schools represent for them not merely a means of offering a wider curricular choice to girls but also a way in which girls may be taught how to challenge patriarchal relations in society. Single-sex schools in this context would have a new *subversive* potential. If one could set up a single-sex school with a predominantly female teaching staff, a female head, and all female pupils, the potential is there to encourage girls to 'resist oppression in wider society'. The 'positive' aspects of girls' schools encompass not merely the absence of boys, with their jokes, their ridicule of girls, their absorption of the teacher's energy and attention, their competitive spirit, their aggression and the imposition of their notions of femininity, but also the absence of male teachers, male control and responsibility for decision-making. (see Sarah, Scott and Spender, 1980).

The introduction of single-sex classes for girls within mixed schools in science and mathematics subjects however also makes sense. After all, if boys can get help on remedial reading classes, why cannot girls be helped to overcome their reluctance to study mathematics, and their lack of familiarity with technical subjects? Such remedial work really begs the question: can genuinely 'comprehensive' schools exist when there is still education inequality of the sexes within them? Should we still keep working at this ideal, or should we go back to single-sex schools? Perhaps we should rethink the notion of coeducation, which never really meant equal education for boys and for girls but only a range of common and different subject choices.

The correct strategy is very hard to assess, especially since most of the evidence is inadequate and is based on single-dimensional analyses. It is important to remember that the issue of coeducation involves the problem of selective and nonselective schools, of the private and public sector, of denominational schools and boarding schools; that the resources are unlikely to be available to bring all single-sex schools up to the level of coeducation facilities; and that since most of the single-sex schools are private schools or were grammar schools, single-sex education is closely tied to social class divisions in education.

Finally there is also a practical consideration to take into account. If girls are best educated in single-sex schools but boys are not, where will the girls be found to fill the mixed schools? What sort of education is best for boys in order for them to change their stereotypes of masculinity and femininity? So far,



there has been very little discussion of this aspect of coeducation, although a few projects with boys have been started (see Arnot, 1984).

### *Classroom practice*

Finally, let us look at the structure of classroom life. Here there are a variety of factors to consider – for example, does the sex of the teacher, the presence of boys, the teaching style, or the attitudes of teachers make a difference to girls?

Historically, the development of the state educational system (especially primary schools and girls' schools) has been based upon a supply of female teachers. Yet the development of mixed schools, particularly at secondary level, has limited the career prospects of female teachers. It is still unusual to find a female head teacher in a mixed school. This fact is important, not just for the women who are teachers struggling to get promotion within the school system, but also for the pupils. By witnessing the sexual division of labour within the teaching profession, especially in terms of the hierarchy of responsibilities and power, the child is likely to acquire a certain perception of the social order. Certainly, if there is one thing that is clear in the history of the educational system, it is that men have had control over the development, the shaping and the administration of education. Further, the sex of teachers is important, if one believes that learning comes through imitation. As Alison Kelly has argued, the lack of women science teachers may contribute to the attribution of masculinity to scientific studies and to girls' reluctance to study such subjects. It may be particularly significant therefore that in 1977 only one per cent of female secondary school teachers' main subject of highest qualification was in craft, design and technology, and only one per cent of male teachers had Home Economics as their subject of highest qualification (EOC, 1982).

Earlier research focussed on the attitudes of teachers and showed that both male and female teachers had similar expectations of gender differences and differentiated between male and female pupils in similar ways – a fact that is hardly surprising if one considers the similarity of teacher training courses and their lack of coverage of the issues of sex discrimination in schools. Both sets of teachers in primary schools appeared to have similar stereotypical attitudes to boys' and girls' futures after school. Glennys Lobban (1978) argues that the evidence in teachers in primary schools shows that:

Teachers of both sexes thus appear to endorse sex-role stereotypes. They believe that extreme differences between males and females exist as early as age three. They also appear to believe that it is appropriate to behave differently to the sexes in accord with their 'natural' characteristics. They seem to interpret behaviour according to stereotypes, they expect their female pupils to be passive, dependent, compliant and on the way to marriage as their only life-consuming career, while the males are expected to be active, independent, bright and challenging and destined for a 'real' career. (p.57).

However, Michelle Stanworth (1981) looked more closely at a group of teachers who taught 'A' level classes in a humanities department of a college of further education. The college was completely coeducational and appeared not to discriminate between pupils by sex in any formal way. Using a variety



of research techniques, she found that male teachers were far more likely than female teachers to view the sexes as relatively discrete groups. Thus, they were more likely to compare a boy with other boys, rather than with girls in the same class. Male teachers were also much more likely to be attached to or concerned about boys than girls. The chance, for example, that a boy was the focus of the teacher's concern was twice that of a girl, if the teacher was a woman, but ten times more if the teacher were a man. Girls were twice as likely to be 'rejected' than boys of the same academic standing.

First impressions of girls entering the class were that they were exceptionally quiet; teachers also tended to learn boys' names more quickly. When the teachers were asked to speculate about what various pupils would be doing in two and five years time, boys were thought likely to have jobs of considerable responsibility and authority, e.g. civil service and management, and marriage and parenthood were only mentioned in one boy's case. The occupations girls were thought likely to enter were those of secretary, nurse and teacher which Stanworth found neither matched any individual girl's academic standing nor aspirations.

Both male and female teachers suggested, and took for granted, that girls would marry and become parents, whatever their educational abilities. Male teachers, in particular, had difficulty envisaging careers for girls. Such views obviously have repercussions as to how girls are treated in classrooms and in the perceived importance of 'A' levels in their future lives.

Equally important for girls is the ability of the teacher to maintain authority and control in the classroom with pupils of different sex. Again, there is very little research completed on this crucial area of school life, but what little there is suggests that female teachers may have far more trouble coping with male pupils, who are generally the most troublesome in the classroom. This may be because male pupils have learnt from a very young age that women are powerless and inferior and that they can exploit the classroom situation 'as boys'.

Valerie Walkerdine's (1981) research has shown that little boys can challenge the teacher's authority by using sexist language and behaviour. She recorded the following sequence in a nursery school. It starts when three-year-old Annie takes a piece of Lego to add to a construction she is building. Four-year-old Terry tries to take it from her to use himself, and she resists. He says:

*Terry:* You're a stupid cunt, Annie.

The teacher tells him to stop and Sean tries to mess-up another child's construction. The teacher tells him to stop. Then Sean says:

*Sean:* Get out of it Miss Baxter paxter.

*Terry:* Get out of it knickers Miss Baxter.

*Sean:* Get out of it Miss Baxter paxter.

*Terry:* Get out of it Miss Baxter the knickers paxter knickers, bum.

*Sean:* Knickers, shit, bum.

*Miss B:* Sean, that's enough, you're being silly.

*Sean:* Miss Baxter, knickers, show your knickers.

*Terry:* Miss Baxter, show your bum off.

(they giggle)



Miss B: I think you're being very silly.

Terry: Shit Miss Baxter, shit Miss Baxter.

Sean: Miss Baxter, show your knickers your bum off.

Sean: Take all your clothes off, your bra off.

Terry: Yeah, and take your bum off, take your wee-wee off, take your clothes, your mouth off.

Sean: Take your teeth out, take your head off, take your hair off, take your bum off. Miss Baxter the paxter knickers taxter.

Miss B: Sean, go and find something else to do please.

(Walkerdine, 1981, p.15)

Such manipulation of male-female relations by very young boys, Walkerdine argues, causes problems not just for the girls and female teachers involved, but also raises questions about the value of 'progressive' education for girls. The notion of childhood sexuality underlying this pedagogy has its roots in psychoanalysis which stresses that children's sexual natures should be 'released' rather than developed; 'expressed' rather than repressed. Any suppression of sexual feelings and their manifestation, particularly amongst boys, it is feared might lead to later aggression or deformity of personality. With progressive education, teaching therefore is designed on the principle of *non-intervention*.

The irony is that within the 'space' created by progressivism for children to define what they want and don't want to do, sexist practices and language learnt at home and in the community can be brought into the classroom and cannot be corrected or interfered with by the teacher (as shown by the teacher's response in the transcript above). Walkerdine therefore suggests that any desire to remove sexism in progressive schools will have to challenge the validity of such 'freedoms' for girls. The picture she presents of life within a nursery school however is not totally bleak since the girls fight back temporarily using traditional female roles of domesticity and mothering. However, it does raise critical questions about what teachers' practice should be.

In terms of classroom interaction, the research on primary education indicates that boys and girls receive different amounts and quality of attention from teachers. At one level, girls are taught to need teacher approval more than boys; yet girls adopt a definition of maturity that involves the early acceptance of quietness and obedience. Because of this, girls tend to receive more approval for gender conformity and interact less with their teachers, who concentrate on the more difficult boys in the classroom. Boys receive more prohibitory messages than girls – in other words they are punished more for failing to keep order and for misbehaviour – yet they also receive more than their share of all types of interaction with the teacher.

In Stanworth's study such research findings were borne out for A-level pupils. Although pupils criticized both male and female teachers for being insufficiently authoritarian, they saw male teachers as 'more effective disciplinarians'. Boys, in particular, saw male teachers as more successful and female teachers as less. Girls, in contrast, were more even-handed in their



ranking. Girls felt that female teachers were easy to get on with, more fun, and more helpful; similarly boys preferred male teachers.

Given such attitudes amongst teachers and such classroom practices, how then did such pupils see the pattern of classroom interaction? In Stanworth's study, both male and female pupils perceived boys as receiving far more attention than girls from the teacher. Boys were more likely to get involved in classroom discussions, to comment, to demand help or attention and to be seen as 'model' pupils by the other pupils. Boys were also perceived as more likely to be asked questions, to be seen as highly conscientious by the teacher, to get on best with the teacher and receive more praise and more criticism. They were more likely to be the ones the teacher appeared to enjoy teaching. As Stanworth puts it, girls were placed on 'the margins of classroom life'.

The implications of such pupil perceptions, and the pattern of teachers' expectations and reinforcement of gender differences, are serious for girls as a group, specially if they legitimate as 'natural' the unequal relationships between pupils themselves. Increasingly research on the sexual relations within schools and between boys and girls points to the dominance of boys over girls and the 'laissez faire' attitude of schools to this domination. Research such as that by Sue Lees (1983) shows how the boys' language and in particular their naming of different types of girls 'slags' or 'drags' has the effect of categorizing girls by their sexual attractiveness and availability to males, rather than by their personalities or abilities. Girls themselves, in trying to negotiate the fine line between these insults, use and manipulate the distinctions, often at the expense of giving attention to themselves as people in their own right. The research by Mahony (1985) and Wood (1984) also points to the ways in which boys dominate the linguistic and physical space of the school and sexually harass girls. They illustrate the ways in which masculinity is constructed through the devaluation and sexual denigration of girls and the imposition of their values upon the girls. Increasingly sexual harassment in secondary schools is being taken up by feminist teachers as a matter of the deepest concern.

Stanworth's research shows how even at A-levels this devaluation of girls is still present. Boys downgrade the girls' ability and see them as a 'faceless bunch', when they are not chasing them for sexual favours. The overall impression she received was that 'classroom interaction . . . does not merely transmit beliefs about the superiority of one sex over the other, but actively serves to give such beliefs a concrete foundation in personal experience' (p.51). It is precisely the teachers' policy of 'non-intervention' in this process which, in her view, constitutes a 'significant political act'.

## Conclusion

I have argued here that patterns of female education achievement need to be explained by a whole range of structures. I discussed the history of state policies for women's education and their underlying ideologies of gender differentiation and social class differentiation. I tried also to show that within



educational institutions, gender differentiation is not just a matter of attitudes or of unintentional discrimination, but of what could be called 'institutional sexism'—i.e. hidden structures of sex inequality found in, for example, classroom interaction, in teachers' expectations and practice, and in the structured interaction between boys and girls in the classroom, corridor or playground. The ideological assumptions behind state policy are not separate influences but are built on and incorporated into educational practice, especially since such assumptions have had such a long and continuous history. We are not dealing here with just an educational problem for which an educational solution can be found. Educational policy and practice, cannot be divorced from the position of women in the economy—both as waged and domestic workers within patriarchal social relations.

If we ask whether state education policy has benefited women we have to seek the answer, not necessarily in the success of some women to reach university, or to gain more qualifications than they had previously, but in the general social location of women in the economy and the family. And here it is difficult to see substantial improvements in women's position over the course of the twentieth century. Further, even if women have achieved a higher level of education than previously, the experiences they face *inside* educational institutions still leaves room for concern. In many ways state education, whether intentionally or unintentionally, has discriminated against the majority of female pupils—for example by allowing the shift to coeducation without substantial assessment of its impact and the new problems it has engendered. Overall there appears to have been a lack of real concern over the future of girls and women in society, and the future role they could play within the changing labour force, yet what this analysis has shown is that in reality the intervention of the state into girls' education has not been 'neutral'. It has operated to maintain differences between the sexes and the sexual division of labour, both explicitly and implicitly. The extent to which the education system has succeeded in doing this is arguable—mediated as it is by the personal and collective struggles of women to 'break out' of the mould. Women have won some major victories—such as gaining access to secondary and higher education, and more recently to scientific education. However, what in the end constitutes a victory of women is a matter of some contention. Should women aspire to succeed within a male defined and structured educational system? Or should we challenge the principles according to which such a patriarchal system of education has developed?



Note

Social class classification for Table 1 (Source: Based on Reid, 1981, p. 43-5)

Social Class	Occupations
1	<i>Professional workers</i> —self-employed normally requiring qualifications to degree standard.
2	<i>Employers and managers</i> —in central and local government, industry, commerce, large and small establishments and farmers (employers and managers) who own, rent or manage farms employing other than family workers.
3	<i>Intermediate non-manual workers</i> —employees engaged in clerical sales non-manual communications and security.
4	<i>Foremen and supervisors</i> —manual employees <i>Skilled manual workers</i> <i>Own account workers</i> —self-employed in trade, personal service or manual occupations, with no employees other than family workers. <i>Farmers</i> —who own or rent with only family workers.
5	<i>Personal service workers</i> —employees engaged in service occupations caring for food, drink, clothing and other needs. <i>Semi-skilled manual workers</i> <i>Agricultural workers</i>
6	<i>Unskilled manual workers</i>

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# 10.

## Political lip-service or radical reform? Central government responses to sex equality as a policy issue

*Madeleine Arnot*

Between the late 1960s and the mid 1980s, equality between the sexes became a major focus of debate within the education service. Attention focused primarily, although not exclusively on the problem of female education. In the past, the criterion used for educational planning had been one of maintaining gender differentiation – of educating male and female pupils for different, complementary roles in adult life. By the early 1970s, however, such criteria were challenged by a new set of principles concerning social equality. In the new economic and ideological climate, such principles appeared conservative, if not unjust.

The primary aim of this chapter is to investigate how equality between the sexes became an educational issue and why anti-discrimination legislation was passed in 1975. I will consider what implications such legislation had for education and how the law has been implemented. I shall also consider the responses of three major policy-making bodies – the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), the Department of Education and Science (DES) and the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) – to the issue of sex equality in education, and suggest ways in which their responses can be interpreted.

### Sex discrimination and the policy agenda

Since the Second World War, a number of major changes had taken place which were key factors in reshaping education policy. Some of the most noticeable of these were changes in the economic position of women, economic expansion and the construction of new political debates and ideologies around concepts of equality and civil rights.

One of the major changes in employment patterns in the twentieth century was clearly evident by the 1960s – namely the increased proportion of married women workers. Between 1911 and 1961 the proportion of married women who were economically active had risen from 10 to 30 per cent (EOC, 1981a).<sup>1</sup> This increase in married women workers had repercussions for the patterns of female employment. For example, lack of adequate childcare facilities and the domestic responsibilities of women with families led a large proportion of women to take part-time employment. By 1978, 84 per cent of all part-time workers were women: women part-time workers represented 40 per cent of the female work-force (DES, 1981).

Large numbers of women were clustered in a very small range of occupations,

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usually described as 'women's work'. For example, by the early 1970s over two-thirds of women workers were employed in service industries (e.g., financial, professional and scientific services, distributive trades and miscellaneous services such as catering and laundry work). Men and women worked essentially in different sets of occupations, in what has been called a *segregated* labour market (see, for example, MacDonald, 1981; Beechey, 1986).

Other aspects of female employment which also became significant in debates about women's work and their education were unequal pay and restricted access to higher status employment. Between 1970 and 1978 women's average earnings were below 65 per cent of men's average earnings. Even where women achieved equivalent educational qualifications to men their pay was substantially less (Reid, 1981, p. 211).<sup>2</sup> Also, women were not often employed in the higher levels of skilled work or in supervisory or managerial/professional positions. Skilled work had become defined as work which men did (Phillips and Taylor, 1980). This became even more evident in the early 1970s when only 14 per cent of skilled manual workers were women, and the proportion of female unskilled workers reached 37 per cent (Hakim, 1978, p. 1267).<sup>3</sup>

Evidence of such patterns of female employment collected by various campaigning groups (see Rendel, 1985) in the late 1960s helped gather support among politicians and policy-makers who, if not convinced of the injustice of such sexual divisions, saw their implications for manufacturing industry. Post-war reports on education and training were concerned with shortages of skilled labour and scientists and technologists needed for economic expansion. The Robbins Report (Committee on Higher Education, 1963), for example, pointed to the 'reserves of untapped ability' among girls and women, but mostly it was the career interests of grammar school or 'academically able' girls that had captured policy-makers' attention (Deem, 1981; Wolpe, 1976). Ironically, little attention was paid to the need to draw girls into apprenticeships for skilled work or non-traditional courses (Wickham, 1986).

The political and social climate of the 1960s also provided a conducive environment for those concerned with social inequality in post-war prosperity. In this decade, political movements campaigned for civil rights – for a less hierarchical society and for a more equal distribution of wealth and power. In the United States the black civil rights movement and the women's movement fought for policies to tackle race and sex discrimination.

Although few accounts are available of the politics surrounding the passage of the Sex Discrimination Act, 1975, it is clear that the impetus for reform came largely from the developing women's movement and from individuals active in political parties and trades unions (see Bryne and Lovenduski, 1978; Rendel, 1985). By the late 1960s only a limited number of strategies to combat social inequality were available to reformers, particularly those concerned with education. Important precedents had been set by experiments to reduce social class inequalities (e.g., Educational Priority Areas, comprehensive school reorganization, the removal of the 11-plus examination, the expansion of higher education). However, none of these strategies had proved to be particularly effective in eradicating class differences. Attempts to tackle the 'problem' of



'immigrant' education and race relations had also yielded few results – race discrimination and conflict apparently becoming more widespread.

Anti-discrimination legislation had also been developed. The Race Relations Acts, 1965 and 1968, paved the way through opposition to the use of legislation to tackle social disadvantage and prejudicial attitudes, even if these were weak in their formulation and powers of enforcement (McCrudden, 1982). Such legislation was an important means of changing the climate of opinion by legitimating the concept of 'discrimination' in policy debates and giving credibility to attempts at social reform. However, as yet, no-one had attempted to use anti-discrimination legislation for the education system.

Experience from the United States suggested that a centralized enforcement agency in addition to the courts would be useful in co-ordinating policy on discrimination. Where the power lay to enforce change in the education system in the UK was a matter of interpretation. The assumed 'partnership' between the DES, LEAs and teachers was not one which could easily embrace coercion on such issues as sex or race discrimination.

The education system is essentially conservative. If discrimination exists within it, considerable pressure would be required to produce any major change. Women's access to power within the education service has been, therefore, a critical determinant of the choice of political strategy. The fact that women constituted the majority of teachers, in Scale 1 and 2 posts in primary and secondary schools, but that only a small proportion of deputy heads or heads were women has been significant. Also relevant, perhaps, has been the fact that the proportion of women in leadership roles in primary and secondary schools in the period between 1965 and 1974 actually declined, particularly in headships in secondary schools. In further and higher education the picture has been similar (see Byrne, 1978).

Where women have been given higher scale or special responsibility posts, these tended to be typically 'female' – for example, as senior mistresses in mixed schools responsible for the pastoral needs of girls, social functions, pregnant schoolgirls, 'difficult' parents, or school attendance. The mainstream responsibilities of school organization, curriculum arrangements, administration, examinations and resource allocation have been primarily given to men (Byrne, 1978, p. 233). School ancillary staff also reflected this sexual division of labour – office staff, 'dinner ladies' and librarians were usually female, and caretakers invariably male (Marland, 1983, pp. 52–3).

Few women have been able to use the channels of access to policy-making available to HM Inspectors, Chief Education Officers, local authority inspectors or even advisers, since these positions were generally filled by men. The under-representation of women was such that there were often no women at all in the most senior positions in educational management. Women could have gained access to policy-making as teacher governors or parent governors, especially when explicit attempts were made to improve their representation: 'Note III of the Model Instrument of Government for County Secondary Schools (1945) proposed that "adequate representation" should be given to women in the constitution of Governing Bodies' (Johnson, 1983, pp. 6–7). A recent survey (Johnson 1983) revealed a low female participation level, the average being around 35 per cent.



However it is not clear whether the Sex Discrimination Act actually reduced the proportion of female governors by ruling out the possibility of any positive discrimination in their favour.

Women have not fared much better in the world of local and national politics. Seven years after the Sex Discrimination Act, women constituted only 18 per cent of local councillors, and between 1945 and 1985 there were never more than twenty-eight female MPs in parliament (EOC, 1983). Of the few women who reached Cabinet level, they have been more likely to be given the post of Secretary of State for Education and Science than to be made Chancellor or Home Secretary, and of the forty-one Presidents of the Board of Education, Ministers of Education and Secretaries of State for Education and Science so far this century, only four were women: Ellen Wilkinson (1945–7), Florence Horsburgh (1951–4), Margaret Thatcher (1970–4) and Shirley Williams (1976–9).

Given such a distribution of women in policy-making, it was likely that those campaigning for education reform and for equal opportunities for girls and women would seek new legislation, especially if (as was the case in the US: see Fishel and Pottker, 1977) policy-makers in local authorities and in schools and colleges were unsympathetic to the view that education might be sex-biased. Using the courts as agents of change also had the advantage of offering a stronger mechanism for enforcing policy intentions than could be gained through the usual channels of policy-making.

## Education and the Sex Discrimination Act

By the end of the 1960s, the Labour government had responded to political and economic pressures by setting up the Women's National Commission (WNC) in the Cabinet Office to represent at the highest level 'the informed opinion' of women in the country; by sponsoring a number of private members' bills on abortion reform and divorce reform; and by formulating its first major intervention in the shape of the Equal Pay Act 1970. However members of the Labour Party, trade unions and other political organizations mobilized to gather support for a more comprehensive measure, to tackle, at national level, the major obstacles to equality between the sexes.

There was some debate about whether such a measure should be part of the policies designed to deal with racial inequality. The Labour government considered how the procedures, coverage and enforcement provisions of the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and Race Relations Act (1976) could be 'harmonized', and whether a single agency could deal with both issues. Working against the idea of a single agency was, perhaps, the view that women in the UK were unlikely to be happy with such close association with the 'problem' of racial groups, and would expect more serious attention to be given to women's issues. In the end the government moved in favour of

adopting, almost entirely, similar coverage and enforcement details for the eradication of race and sex discrimination.

Not only should this have the practical advantages of increasing public understanding of how the two Acts operated and of enabling both enforcement agencies to work on similar lines, there also appeared to be political advantage in easing the passage of any



race relations legislation since Parliament would already have approved virtually identical enforcement provisions in the Sex Discrimination Act, 1975 (McCrudden, 1982).

Although the wording of the two acts was often identical, the legislation differed in several crucial aspects. For example, certain practices were to be exempt from the provisions of the Sex Discrimination Act: it was felt justifiable to allow some separate and different facilities for each sex but not for each racial group (Home Office, 1974).

A number of features distinguished the Sex Discrimination Act from previous anti-discrimination legislation. Clearly it represented a victory for campaigners for sex equality: 'An ideal which had been thought unimportant had become a matter of government policy' (Rendel, 1978, p. 900). However another distinguishing feature was the inclusion of education for the first time despite opposition from the DES. The surprise with which campaigners greeted such success is conveyed in Byrne's recollections:

Late in the evening, late in November 1975, the telephone rang in the study. The voice of a colleague from Westminster came over the line, succinct, tired, but satisfied. 'It's through'. 'With education and training still in?'. 'Yes'. The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 had finally received the Royal Assent, with, as Huxley would have said, 'all its parts of equal strength and in smooth working order' – or nearly. We had won the first hurdle in legislative terms, in the race to convince government that it is useless to attempt to tackle inequality in employment, in pay and salary, or social discrimination, without simultaneously attacking their causes and counter-remedies – the formative years of education and training (Byrne, 1978, pp. 245–6).

In 1973, while considering its own Sex Discrimination Bill, the Conservative government concluded that there was adequate provision for the Secretaries of State for Education and Science to make sure that the education system was not discriminating on grounds of sex. In contrast the Labour government's *Equality for Women* (Home Office, 1974, p. 13) took the view that these powers of the Secretaries of State for Education and Science did 'not relate expressly to sex discrimination', and did not 'apply to private educational institutions which receive no financial assistance and do not provide education for children of compulsory school age'. Further there were no specific powers in Scottish legislation.

The new legislation, therefore, contained the provision that it was the duty of LEAs, governing bodies and proprietors of schools, colleges and other educational institutions, universities and private educational institutions to provide, for both sexes, facilities of *like quality*, in *like manner* and on *like terms*.

The education sections of the Sex Discrimination Act were contested (see Rendel, 1986, for a full account). The price paid for allowing education to remain in the legislation involved the exemption of single-sex schools and sport from the act. 'Positive action' (i.e. positive discrimination which could take the form of quotas, special access routes or courses) was only permitted within training programmes in the post-compulsory sector (not in general education). Also 'contract compliance' (i.e. funding criteria) was omitted as a strategy. Further the powers of the EOC in implementing the law were curtailed as far as education was concerned. The EOC was unable to issue non-discrimination notices in



relation to investigations into education and complaints about education had to be referred to the Secretary of State in the first instance (Rendel, 1985).

Further the legislation did not deal with sex-stereotyping in school curricula and textbooks either 'because of the administrative opposition it would have aroused' or 'because the content of education was not at that time a subject open to direct ministerial intervention, still less to statutory intervention' (Rendel, 1985, p. 91).

Like the 1976 Race Relations Act, the Sex Discrimination Act, as a policy, can be evaluated in several different ways. Lester and Bindman (1972), for example, see the legislation as representing 'a radical departure from the traditional neutrality and passivity of our legal system'. Britain is unique in western Europe in not having any Bill of Rights or formal constitution. The Race Relations Act (and by implication the Sex Discrimination Act) could therefore be seen as a major step towards attempting to guarantee that every person was treated on the basis of individual merit and towards providing an effective legal remedy for the most unfair or 'degrading' type of discrimination (Lester and Bindman, 1972, p. 15).

Other positive views of the anti-discrimination legislation have been put forward by McCrudden (1982) and Dorn (1985). They point in particular to the new definitions of *indirect discrimination* contained in the Sex Discrimination and Race Relations Acts which were substantially different from earlier versions. The new definition of discrimination took into account some prior existing disadvantages, and encouraged employers not just to refrain from certain actions but to promote equality. The old principle of 'non-discrimination', with its emphasis on removing prejudice, was replaced by a concept of 'fair equality of opportunity' which recognized 'the structural sources of unequal opportunity', in particular 'institutional discrimination'. 'Fair equality of opportunity . . . requires questions to be asked not only about the precise basis on which the good being distributed is deserved but also about the nature of the good being distributed' (McCrudden, 1982, p. 343). The shift in policy represented by the Sex Discrimination Act and the Race Relations Act could be interpreted as a move towards 'stronger' versions of equal opportunity. Dorn called this new policy stance a 'fair-shares approach' because of its concern with 'consequences, effects and outcomes', with promoting equality and justice rather than merely with removing acts of discrimination. Such an approach has considerable potential if adequately used.

A more sceptical view of the legislation saw its failure to tackle equality and to opt yet again for the safer concepts of equality of opportunity (e.g. Byrne, 1985). However even here such legislation was inadequate since it did not require equal opportunities policies to be formulated. The only *duty* expected of a person was not to discriminate against others. Such a limited duty, Bindman (1980) argued, does not encourage a redistribution of the benefits of society. A genuine equal opportunities policy would require at least one of three following methods:

a vigorously enforced law against discrimination which creates a strong motivation to take steps to avoid the risk of legal action; . . . making the adoption of suitable policies itself a legal requirement; and the government using its commercial and other executive powers to stimulate equal opportunity policies (Bindman, 1980, p. 255).



Other criticisms of the Sex Discrimination Act came from feminists who pointed to the failure of the legislation to challenge the covert social mores and the structure of the private sphere particularly of the family.<sup>4</sup> With no attempt to design complementary social policy that could tackle the inequalities between men and women in family life, politicians had ensured that women would retain their traditional roles – the effects of the legislation could at best be marginal. Policies – for example, on school hours, school meals and transport, school dress, and the timing of extra-mural classes – would still be premised upon the work of housewife mothers; as would health care, care of the aged, early childrearing, etc. (see David, 1984).

Such criticisms questioned whether the Sex Discrimination Act could ever be effective in promoting sex equality or even equal opportunity. Was it ever intended to be effective? Rendel has argued that 'equality is a principle to which lip-service is paid but was not (and is not) regarded as one of the great principles which should have priority in implementation' (Rendel, 1985, p. 89). The impact of the Sex Discrimination Act on education was dependent initially on the Equal Opportunities Commission and the courts and it is to these we now turn.

## **The Equal Opportunities Commission**

The implementation of the Sex Discrimination Act is the responsibility of the EOC, a quasi-autonomous non-governmental organization (or quango) set up, like the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), to have a 'strategic' role. The EOC's role was 'to eliminate discrimination; promote equality of opportunity between men and women; help individuals seek redress under the law and keep under review the working of the Sex Discrimination Act and the Equal Pay Act 1970' (EOC, 1976, p. 4).

EOC commissioners (unlike those of the CRE) were selected to represent the wider political and industrial constituencies in society; for example, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and Confederation of British Industry (CBI) were each given three seats. Appointees have not been selected on the basis of their involvement in the women's movement nor their 'feminist' stance. Indeed commissioners and officers were apparently encouraged to 'leave their feminist hats' at home (Meehan, 1982, p. 15).

The initial approach of the EOC towards its role was excessively cautious. In its first annual report it was at pains to stress the difficulty of its task and the need to tread carefully.

Sex discrimination is rooted deep in the soil of attitudes, expectations and institutional practices. Many of its manifestations are obvious; the remedies, frequently, are not. Sometimes there is more than one option available; they all have to be weighed carefully. Nor would it serve the public interest to convey the impression that this most ancient form of inequality can be remedied overnight with a few, spectacular strokes. There is much undramatic, patient, humdrum work necessary; the results will not be visible instantly. It is especially important that the credibility of this powerful law should not be weakened on account of lack of forethought or deliberation. Neither the public interest nor the cause of equality for women would be served by precipitate action or the indiscriminate use of powers because these powers exist. The Commission is under



no illusion that the road ahead is long, that the challenge of equality is a hard one, and it believes that it has been important to take stock of its priorities, so that in the years ahead its powers of enforcement can be deployed with the full force which Parliament intended (EOC, 1976, pp. 4-5).

The extent to which such caution determined policy was nowhere more clear than in the case of education. The EOC first concentrated upon removing sex discrimination as defined by the letter of the law. Such discrimination, it argued, occurred more *by default* than by intent. Given that its legal powers were limited in terms of enforcing change in the education system and that education planning was largely decentralized, the EOC faced a number of dilemmas. How could a quango promote fast policy change in education, given its location outside the education system and the belief in local autonomy which then existed? How could it produce change in education without using the law unless really necessary, or unless legal procedures could produce more significant reform of behaviour than gaining the consent of the individuals or the agency involved?

The line which the EOC adopted towards education has been one of operating within the structure of education policy-making, rather than insisting on new strategies of centralized direction. It has concentrated its efforts on opening negotiation channels with LEAs, schools and colleges and with the DES, MSC, teacher unions, etc. The policy approach has been largely proscriptive rather than prescriptive, reactive rather than proactive (see Arnot, 1986). The impetus for its work has been a belief that sex discrimination can be removed from the education system by increased knowledge of the issues, rational discussion and limited coercion mainly using the threat of the law. The option of using the courts to enforce change appeared unattractive. Judges, after all, were not trained to deal with such legislation (Rendel, 1985; Kant, 1985); discrimination in education was hard to prove; the curriculum courses to which pupils might be denied access were likely to have already finished by the time the courts had ruled; parents would be reluctant to put their child through the courts only to be criticized by the judge for so doing; and compensation, if awarded, was difficult to collect.<sup>5</sup> Further some of the most contentious educational issues, such as sexual harassment, were not challengeable in law.

Teacher employment appears to be the only educational issue which could be effectively tackled through the courts. The EOC has taken a number of cases of discrimination in teacher employment to court and has won some important victories. The principle of equal pay for work of equal value enshrined in the Equal Pay Act (1984) is also likely to produce an increase in such cases being taken to court.<sup>6</sup>

The central policy goals of the EOC's education department have been to gain *equal access* and *treatment* for all pupils and students to educational facilities and benefits. Equal opportunities has been framed within liberal concerns of promoting equality of educational opportunity, maintaining an individual's freedom of choice by removing 'obstacles', increasing student motivation and re-educating the teaching profession and its managers. The primary source of sex discrimination has been defined as that of *curriculum differentiation*. The patterns of male and female subject choice and specialisms in school, college or university or



within the teaching profession, different teaching and assessment styles, and classroom practice, have been the main focus of attention. The ideal has been to encourage boys and girls into 'non-traditional' courses, and to encourage more female teachers into senior posts, into education management and into scientific and technical subjects. Attention has focused on providing examples of good practice for teachers at all levels of the educational system and codes for employment practice.

The goals of the EOC are essentially liberal, in so far as they aim for improvement in the distribution of education, compensation for individuals for past disadvantage and changes in social attitudes. Its approach emphasizes the impact of traditional sex-role socialization and attempts to replace it with a fairer system of preparation for family and work lives.

The strategy adopted by the EOC to obtain these objectives has much in common with the 'softly softly approach' initially adopted by the CRE (Arnot, 1986). By negotiating with chief education officers, inspectors and the advisory services in LEAs, the EOC has tried to settle complaints without going to court. One of the priorities has been to promote good practice through the distribution of booklets such as *Do You Provide Equal Educational Opportunities?* (EOC 1980) to every educational institution and LEA. (Other more specialized booklets on, for instance, caring for the under-fives, careers guidance, home economics, craft, design and technology, post-compulsory school, and school governors have also been produced.) Heads of schools and colleges have been requested to place sex discrimination on the agenda at staff meetings and to encourage teachers and lecturers to help change institutional practices.

Such a strategy has been fraught with difficulties. For example, there were few guarantees that teachers would receive or even read the material (booklets were distributed on the basis of one per school). Further, such material was often interpreted in a way that confirmed existing attitudes. Borley (1982) evaluated the impact of *Do You Provide Equal Educational Opportunities?* on a sample of coeducational secondary schools and found that the material was 'preaching to the converted', or it reaffirmed the view that schools could continue as they were and still be within the law, or it confirmed change already in progress. She concluded that publication and dissemination was not likely to be an adequate way to change the status quo, particularly if too much discretion was left to LEAs and schools. Indeed the evidence suggests that teachers are still conservative in their attitudes towards sex equality issues, and display little commitment to change (Pratt, 1985).

The EOC, however, has seemed reasonably happy with the impact of its policy. In 1983 it came to the conclusion that:

The Commission has played a major part in bringing equal opportunities into the mainstream of educational debate. The evidence is visible in many ways. Some local education authorities have now appointed Equal Opportunity Advisers; most HM Inspectorate reports include comments on aspects of the curriculum and staffing relating to equal opportunities; and the educational press regularly features articles on issues central to the Commission's concerns. It may be some years before this increased awareness is translated into quantifiable results, but the reality of the process is evident to all those familiar with the educational world (EOC, 1983, p. 2).



It is certainly to the EOC's credit and to the force of the Sex Discrimination Act that, when complaints are made, LEAs apparently '... almost without exception have demonstrated a willingness to comply with the legislation and to improve the education facilities for the pupils concerned' (Carr, 1984). However, many would challenge the EOC's view that '... although ten years ago the educational establishment regarded the Sex Discrimination Act as at best marginal to its concerns. Today equality of opportunity in education between boys and girls is regarded *as a central part of a school's business*' (EOC, 1985, p. 2) (my emphasis).

The EOC's policy on education has been much criticized, not least for its failure to use civil litigation to settle complaints and its failure to use what has been called the most powerful tool of the legislation – formal investigations (e.g. Byrne and Lovenduski, 1978; Applebey and Ellis, 1984). By 1985 only four formal investigations had been conducted – none of which appears to have any major impact. No sizeable body of case law has been established and the law remains largely untested.

However by the mid 1980s, the EOC has taken a more active interest in proposing reforms of the Sex Discrimination Act. EOC education officers have argued for the better use of this legislation and have allowed that the reluctance of some LEAs and schools to change their practice is attributable to indifference or hostility rather than ignorance of the law or of good practice (Carr 1985). Recent successful cases are likely to encourage further the use of courts and the investigative powers of the EOC to initiate its own agenda.<sup>7</sup>

Other criticisms of the EOC are, however, harder to meet. Feminist influence appears to have had little impact on the EOC as an organization. Meehan (1982) pointed to the failure of the EOC to orchestrate and use a policy network of women's groups and to organize a political constituency to keep women's issues on politicians' agendas. In the educational world, teachers' anti-sexist and anti-racist projects are not publicized and there is little support for them, other than occasional project or conference grants (despite a commitment by the EOC to fund networking especially after the demise of the Schools Council). The impact of the legislation and the EOC are also disappointing for those who wish to see greater evidence of sex equality in schooling – i.e., improvements in the quality of schooling for girls and in the experience of women teachers.

The EOC appears to be trapped within the structure of the legislation and its legal procedures. It is also limited by the political and administrative structure of government in the UK. The EOC's role as a quango has meant maintaining a stance of political neutrality (even though appointing EOC commissioners and allocating funds are the responsibility of the Home Office) and coping with a lack of security about its future. Although set up by a Labour government, the EOC has been maintained through a long period by a Conservative government. It is perhaps the liberalism of its stance and also its lack of threat to the tenets of conservatism which paradoxically has ensured its survival at times of government cuts in expenditure.



## Central government policy and gender differentiation

Under the terms of the 1944 Education Act, the responsibility of ensuring that LEAs were not acting *unreasonably* lay with the DES. These responsibilities would, however, be irrelevant to the issue of sex equality unless sex discrimination in education was defined as unreasonable behaviour (Bloomfield and Pratt, 1980). But in fact this has not occurred and neither has the DES interpreted its 'powers' under the Education Act as those of defining and implementing an equal opportunities policy. The Sex Discrimination Act, it seems, also allowed the DES the opportunity to choose how far it would involve itself in promoting equal opportunities or implementing the legislation. The main responsibility for ensuring that unlawful behaviour did not occur within the maintained sector of education lay with LEAs, and this delegation, as we shall see, appears to have met with DES approval.

Clearly the extent to which the DES involves itself in gender issues is determined by the extent of the political will of the government in power, not merely its own interpretation of its 'powers'. If the political will is there, the DES has a variety of policy options available to it. Theoretically it could offer grants to encourage the development of curriculum initiatives, establish in-service courses and improve initial teacher education. It could use its approval mechanisms and its involvement in school/college building programmes and school reorganization to encourage particular policies (e.g. co-education or single-sex schools, science laboratories for girls' schools, adequate craft workshops for mixed schools etc.).

Assessing the DES stance towards sex equality in education is not a simple task. One could, for example, try and identify a policy within DES reports and publications, or one could assess the record of DES interventions. The latter activity would yield few results. The only projects with which the DES appears to have been directly involved are small numbers of DES/regional in-service training courses on aspects of sex-stereotyping in education, and short courses promoting equal opportunities in schools (Orr, 1985). Theoretically, the establishment of the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE) responsible for validating courses according to new DES criteria for initial teacher education contains the possibility of creating more substantial change.<sup>8</sup> One of these criteria is that students need to learn how 'to guard against preconceptions based on the race or sex of the pupils' (Circular 3/84, para 11). Wormald (1985), however, questions whether members of CATE (three women and fifteen men) are 'sensitized' sufficiently to the issues. For example, will they inquire if a course alerts students to the implications of such 'preconceptions' for resource allocation, for school and classroom organization or for the structure of the teaching profession, etc? Further, 'It will be important to know what questions CATE . . . is going to ask in its visits. . . . Will [it], for instance, report on sexist language and attributes in the training institutions?' (Wormald, 1985, p. 115).

Some scepticism about the impact of this initiative will no doubt remain. For example, the recent failure of the DES to use the opportunity provided by the Education (Grant and New Awards) Act 1985 to allocate funds to curriculum projects on gender gives grounds for suspicion that the sentiments expressed about equal opportunities in recent initiatives are indeed only lip-service.



It is significant that no explicit policy statement has been issued by the DES concerning equal opportunities for girls/women. A policy statement on sex equality would be even less likely, given the current political climate. Further, there has been no committee of inquiry to examine sex inequality comparable to the Rampton/Swann Committee investigating racial disadvantage in education. No central funds have been allocated to cater for the needs of girls along the lines of Section 11 grants for schools with a high proportion of ethnic minority pupils, nor has the DES prioritized gender as a concern for in-service funding. The DES has selected a role which one could argue is minimal and non-interventionist. A generous interpretation might argue that, as in the case of race (Kirp, 1985), the DES has developed a 'gender inexplicit policy' in order to 'do good by stealth'.

The central premise of the DES approach has been to maintain publicly that the prime responsibility for implementing the Sex Discrimination Act lies with local authorities and that the DES only has an 'advisory' role. The autonomy of local authorities and schools/colleges was reinforced clearly in Circular 2/76 (DES 1976) when the DES informed local authorities of their obligations under the Act:

9. . . Responsibility for evaluating curriculum to provide equal access to experience, information and guidance rests with local education authorities, managers and governors, and, most important of all, the teachers. While the Secretary of State will not hesitate to use his powers to stop any particular act of discrimination, he does not control the curriculum and it is important for teachers, with the support of local education authorities, to take a hard look at the organization of the curriculum and to consider whether the materials and techniques they use, and the guidance they give, especially in the early years, inhibit free choice later.

23 The Secretary of State expects that most local education authorities will be able to comply with the requirements of the Act by making appropriate administrative arrangements without incurring significant extra expenditure. If, however, any authorities find that their existing arrangements imply some unlawful discrimination within the terms of the Act and that in consequence some extra expenditure is unavoidable, they will be expected to contain that expenditure within budgets which are consistent with the Government's general advice on local authority expenditure. It will be the responsibility of local education authorities and other responsible bodies to ensure that their existing facilities and resources are so used as to ensure that there shall be no discrimination on grounds of sex (DES, 1976, pp. 3-4, 5 and 8).

Complying with the sex discrimination legislation was, it seems, a 'cheap option', to be catered for by existing budgets. The particular interpretation of sex discrimination in education as a *curriculum* matter allowed the DES to maintain such a stance. The only form of pressure it seems to have exerted on LEAs was to ask for information on what steps were being taken 'so far as the curriculum is concerned with the provisions and intentions of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975' (DES, 1977a). The use to which such information was put is unclear – it was never published. Whatever the response, in the same year the Green Paper *Education in Schools* firmly declared that 'distinctions between what boys study and what girls study are disappearing, and in many schools both are now educated for shared domestic responsibilities, including the responsibility of future parenthood' (quoted in Hannon, 1979, p. 105).

Various interpretations of DES policy on equal opportunities are available.



Some attempt has been made to glean a policy stance in the few sentences which appear on the subject in various official reports and policy documents. Arguably the absence of reference to gender issues (or 'gender blindness' – see Wormald, 1985) is more significant than the limited number of references to be found. Byrne (1985) takes such neglect of the issues as a sign that the DES has had no clear or coherent policy other than a series of initiatives which are addressed more towards equal opportunities than sex equality. Hannon (1979), on the other hand, identified DES policy as being one of 'negative exhortation' seen, for example, in such statements as 'care must be taken to see that girls do not, by subject choice, limit their career opportunities'. Schools should not, according to the DES 'by their assumptions, decisions or choice of teaching materials, limit the educational opportunities offered to girls' (DES, quoted in Hannon, 1979, p. 105).

However by 1985, Orr (an HMI with a strong concern for equal opportunities) saw, 'a clear commitment in government policy statements to the need to promote equal opportunities in schools and to encourage girls, in particular, in those areas of the curriculum where there is evidence of sex-related separation or under-achievement' (Orr, 1985). In contrast with Hannon's observation six years earlier that government policy lacked any 'serious intention to change matters', Orr identified a policy shift in, for example, *The School Curriculum* (DES, 1981), *Science Education in Schools* (DES, 1982) and the Cockcroft Report (Committee of Inquiry into the Teaching of Mathematics in Schools, 1982) which dealt specifically, although briefly, with girls' education or equal opportunities between the sexes. Other education policies, Orr argued, which focused, for example, on the importance of science for *all* pupils in primary schools or the development of new curricula in secondary schools, had significant implications for girls' education (e.g. DES, 1978, 1979).

Such positive views of recent trends in DES thinking are not supported by commentators such as Acker (1986) who points to the 'vague support' – indeed lip-service – given to equal opportunities' issues. In *Better Schools* (DES, 1985), a publication heralded as 'the blueprint for the next century', sex equality was referred to only twice in a chapter on the curriculum; the first reference indicated a need to remove 'preconceptions based on pupils' sex or ethnic origins' in determining curriculum objectives and the second reference states that the curriculum for all pupils should be broad, 'leaving no room for sex discrimination'. These were the only references to equal opportunities in ninety-one pages of text (quoted in Acker, 1986, p. 70).

Further Acker argues that general education policies, rather than benefit women as Orr suggested, have had damaging effects on women (e.g. the cuts in teacher training and adult education, the 'swing to science' and cuts in the arts).<sup>9</sup>

In 1973 the DES was criticized for its 'complacent' reaction to criticisms of the education system in terms of gender differences (House of Commons Select Committee, quoted in Rendel, 1985). Ten years later the Women's National Commission's working group on secondary education also challenged the DES's reluctance to commit itself to firm policies and extra funds. Representatives from the DES giving evidence to this working group argued there was a need for

gradual reform of the curriculum and a move towards greater conformity between schools.



They stressed that the secretary of state had no powers to enforce changes in the curriculum countrywide. There were at present enormous divergences between schools, especially in the third and fourth years when an infinite variety of option choices could be found. DES said that the majority of LEAs were now taking a close interest in the curriculum in their schools, and DES would encourage remaining LEAs to do so. But at present individual schools determine their own curriculum, and progress had to be mainly through persuasion (reported in WNC, 1983, p. 11).

The working group did not entirely accept such arguments for local autonomy or DES 'powerlessness'. They felt that the

DES had the means to give a strong lead through HMIs and through making *extra* resources for particular ends available in a judicious way. They should aim to create the conditions (which might mean more teachers and more facilities) for all girls and boys to experience the main areas of the curriculum (including CDT) before fourteen (WNC, 1983, p. 11).

The belief of the WNC in the possibilities of producing change in education through HM Inspectors would have been strengthened by the unexpected, although not excessive, amount of interest in gender issues they had already displayed. Such interest, particularly in curriculum differentiation, was perhaps initiated by the Inspectorate's involvement in two surveys on curricular differences between boys and girls in preparation for the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. These two reports (DES, 1975 and SED, 1975) represented landmarks in that, for the first time since the 1944 Education Act, an official survey examined the extent of sex differentiation in schools and raised questions about the benefits of co-education for girls. The two surveys provided an important basis for the inclusion of education in the legislation. Feminists such as Dale Spender (Spender and Sarah, 1980) drew on the findings which, although not conclusive nor indeed directly relevant for comprehensive schools, nevertheless played a part in opening a debate about co-education policy – a debate which had not taken place when comprehensive reorganization was introduced in the 1960s.<sup>10</sup>

The initial concern for curriculum differentiation developed into a commitment to encourage girls into science (*Girls and Science*, DES, 1980). However other strands were also visible in HMI reports. The HMI took the unusual step of arguing that schools should recognize that 'the role of women continues to change and with it, inevitably, the role of men. Both contribute to the care and upbringing of children' (DES 1977b, p. 10). Providing equal opportunities in education, they argued, must 'lead to some redistribution of responsibilities within the home as well as in the world of work' (DES, 1977b, p. 10). Rather more radical than equal opportunities statements concerning the need to encourage girls into science, these opinions, although brief, suggested a more active role for schools in changing rather than merely reproducing family relations.

Given the unique relation of the Inspectorate to the DES, it is hard to assess how far these views were actively encouraged, tolerated or largely ignored by DES officials. Interestingly a more limited and pragmatic version of the HMI view was expressed by Sir Keith Joseph, who argued that 'girls' education must reflect the fact that most women will be working for much of their lives and that



many may be the sole or principal breadwinner for a family' (quoted in Orr, 1985).

The possibilities of producing change using the Inspectorate, however, have been severely limited. Orr himself was quoted as saying in 1981 that there were limits to how far the Inspectorate could keep an eye on discrimination. The Inspectorate had been reduced to 400 and could inspect each secondary school only every twenty-five years. The goal was therefore to encourage each school to monitor the progress of its pupils according to sex, develop a curriculum policy that reflected the spirit and not just the letter of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, and aim for a broader curriculum for all pupils (quoted in *Education* 6, November 1981, p. 349).

Increased pressure has been put on the DES by the EOC, WNC and teacher unions, among others, to formulate a more committed response to equal opportunities. Some would argue it is difficult to see how much further the DES could go without treading on the toes of local authorities. Also local authorities themselves now appear to be taking up the challenge. Orr (1985) confirmed that although many might desire 'bold curriculum reform' and 'direct interventionist' strategies on a national scale, the decentralized nature of the English education system, whatever its strengths, was a major constraint on government action and increased the difficulty of 'achieving any ambitious and co-ordinated intervention'. Quoted in an earlier statement (1981), however, Orr had pointed to the fact that 'the whole business of equal opportunities just does not have enough political clout': a view that would probably be shared by many.

## **The MSC and positive action**

In contrast to the DES, the Manpower Services Commission has taken up the challenge of equal opportunities far more directly and apparently with more political will. The reason for this is unclear since there is, as yet, no insider's account of how gender was placed on the MSC agenda in the early 1980s. Probably such a policy shift was brought about by committed individuals within the MSC, by pressure from trade unions, the EOC and also critically the European Economic Community (EEC). The fact that the MSC receives a large proportion of its funding for education projects from the EEC meant that the MSC had to be seen to be at least responsive to EEC equal opportunities initiatives.

In the early 1970s pressure from the EEC alone was not sufficient to press the UK government to respond positively to the Equal Treatment Directive (ETD). Initially the UK was reluctant to act, perhaps because of resentment to EEC interference in national educational systems rather than explicit opposition to dealing with girl's education (ROWE, 1983).

By the late 1970s a variety of EEC programmes of action had been set up which related to girl's education, including the promotion of textbook reform and in-service training. Although smaller than other EEC programmes, some believed that these projects 'went further towards the promotion of equal opportunities for girls than the provisions of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975' (ROWE, 1983, p. 102). The DES response was to consult a number of groups including teachers' unions, the Schools Council and LEAs. It came to the view that the proposals



were 'so tiny as to be insignificant' (ROWE, p.102). In the event, the programme was dropped because of Denmark's opposition.

EEC proposals on equal opportunities were again dismissed in 1985 by the DES when Education Ministers pledged to tackle a range of issues in a ten-point programme designed to reform sex-stereotyping in teaching materials, subject/career choices, teacher training and the employment of teachers. Sir Keith Joseph, the Education Secretary, was quoted as saying such strategies had 'long been our practice' and that Britain had achieved 'considerable success in this field' (*Times Education Supplement*, 7 June 1985).

However, the Sex Discrimination Act had changed the terms of the debate in the training sphere by allowing the possibility of positive action programmes. The MSC was identified as a designated 'training body' in the legislation (the others were industrial training boards, the Training Services Division, and the Employment Service Division). These training bodies had the right to take 'positive action' to overcome the 'effects of past discrimination, as well as the effects of broader cultural and educational influences on people's choice of work' (EOC, 1981b). Such positive action could take the form of 'training' and 'encouragement' for one sex only. Training could include: a specific training or education in skills or subject matter; b development programmes for women in management; c career counselling; d integrated programmes comprising a number of these or similar steps (EOC, 1981b, p. 2). The incentive and the possibilities of action on equal opportunities were therefore more positive for the MSC than the DES.

The MSC made its first tentative steps towards providing new opportunities for women through the Training Opportunities Scheme (TOPS) and Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) courses. However these new courses did little to break down stereotypes – if anything they aggravated the divisions between men's and women's choices. The Youth Training Schemes (YTS) faced similar problems of sex-stereotyping. Little emphasis was placed on training careers' advisers or YTS managers or on pressuring employers to encourage students into non-traditional areas. Although verbal commitment to increasing women's opportunities became more public, state training programmes were still primarily concerned with the needs of men (see Wickham, this volume for more detail; also Arnot, 1986).

The Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative (TVEI) provided those already concerned with gender with the opportunity to push harder for equal opportunities in general education, not only training. The MSC announcement of the first criterion for funding schools for TVEI was, however, somewhat unexpected: 'Equal opportunities should be available to young people of both sexes and they should normally be educated together on courses within each project. Care should be taken to avoid sex-stereotyping' (quoted in WNC, 1984, p. 51).

The MSC required that those receiving TVEI funds show some 'measurable response' to this criterion, and it put pressure on recipients to find solutions to the problem of sex differentiation in curriculum choice, even if the MSC itself had few answers. It was, in effect, the first time that some form of 'contract compliance' was used to promote equal opportunities in education in the UK. Arguably this placed the MSC in a far stronger position than the DES or even the EOC to bring about change in the school system.



The difficulties faced by schools with TVEI funding trying to reduce gender differentiation in curriculum choice were considerable. The MSC provided little help in terms of guidance or information about existing experiments and their effects. Co-ordinators for TVEI schemes were eventually offered some workshops on how to promote equal opportunities – curiously the grants for in-service provision (Grant Related In-service Training (GRIST)) did not specify equal opportunities as one of its priorities for funding. Nevertheless Millman and Weiner (1987) found the following positive effects:

TVEI's equal opportunities criterion had obliged many LEAs who had not previously addressed gender issues to at least look as if they were doing so. Though most TVEI personnel were initially ill-prepared, persistent requests from the MSC for 'hard evidence' of progress on equal opportunities prevented LEAs from backing away from the undeniably complex issues. Some projects maintained a superficial concern but others . . . moved towards a deeper personal and professional understanding of the underlying issues, accompanied by a stronger commitment to tackle them. These are likely to continue asking questions beyond the lifetime of TVEI . . . (Millman and Weiner, 1987).

The possibilities for change 'engendered' by the TVEI approach (such as the collection of data required by the MSC and the availability of resources), indicated the advantages of the MSC approach compared with the advisory role assumed by the DES, or the negotiating role of the EOC. On the other hand, as Millman and Weiner point out, there seems to have been little discussion of the contradictions underlying this new initiative. For example, conflicts between the different strategies adopted by LEA projects, especially the tension between strategies which use compulsion and those supporting freedom of choice, have not been discussed. Also, the MSC TVEI Unit and individual projects have 'disregarded the importance of equal representation of women and men at senior and management levels of TVEI' – TVEI projects are largely run by men. Further, no attempt has been made by the MSC to draw on earlier experiences of the DES, HM Inspectorate, LEA or teacher initiatives.

The MSC has extended this concern for equal opportunities into youth training although criticism is still being expressed about the MSC's lack of policy on such issues as sexual harassment on training courses (e.g. Women in the Manual Trades). The approach of the MSC is still essentially similar to that of the DES and EOC. It maintains the *equal-access* approach, which is dominant in official thinking about equal opportunities, even if some lip-service is paid to the need to ensure equal outcomes. The result is, according to the WNC, 'a training policy for men and a dead end for women' (WNC, 1984, p. 5).

## Conclusion

Interpreting central government responses to sex equality in education is complex. Clearly there has been a policy shift in that the conventional approach of differentiating pupils by gender (an approach which Wolpe (1976) described as the 'common code' of government planning) has been challenged by the Sex Discrimination Act, as well as by the EOC and the MSC. Three different strategies may have been developed by the EOC, DES and the MSC but all three appear to



have adopted an equal opportunities approach (even if only in rhetoric in some instances) rather than a concern for sex equality. For the optimistic, the policies developed by the EOC, the MSC and the support of HM Inspectors indicate positive moves in the direction of change.

Yet there are also signs that such policy shifts and initiatives might affect education only superficially, particularly since no major funding has been available to develop broad programmes of action in nursery, primary, further and higher education. Indeed it seems that only one part of the secondary school curriculum is being developed in terms of equal opportunities (TVEI). The main curriculum initiative on sex-differentiation supported by the Schools Council ended with the demise of that body, and it is not clear how far the new School Curriculum Development Committee (SCDC) will go in providing sufficient resources or the commitment to expand its work on equal opportunities.<sup>11</sup>

Eleven years after the Sex Discrimination Act was passed, belief in the potential of anti-discrimination legislation appears to be waning. In employment, it is unclear whether the legislation made any 'fundamental impact on the low status, low paid and marginal position of women in the labour market' (Jackson, 1984, p. 194), though the initial impact on women's employment was dramatic. However, some or all of these gains were reversed in the latter part of the 1970s (Hakim, 1981). By the early 1980s, the economic recession and increased unemployment, which affected women even more than men, had left their mark. Employers, too, had begun to find new ways of maintaining current patterns of male and female employment and differentiating pay scales.

In education, although the performance of girls and young women had improved greatly, with far more obtaining examination certificates and university degrees than previously, patterns of gender segregation in education remain. The 'hidden curriculum' of schooling (gender dynamics in the classroom, sexual harassment, gendered youth cultures and 'traditional' teacher attitudes) have not proved amenable to reform through persuasion or legislation, especially since the Sex Discrimination Act required little action from schools. Many of the conditions in educational institutions did not need to change in order to fulfil the criteria outlined in the education sections of the act. Further, the argument that inadequate resources have prevented the extension of the curriculum to provide equal opportunities, together with the administrative consequences of falling school rolls, has allowed institutions and local authorities to delay their response.

A number of issues have been raised in this analysis of equal opportunities initiatives and policy. It is becoming increasingly clear that if reform in individual schools and colleges is hard to establish, it is even harder to extend reform to other institutions without some central support and intervention. Equal opportunities policies have revealed the difficulty of resolving the tension between demands for local autonomy and centralization, between calls for *laissez-faire* and interventionist policies, between grassroots or 'top down' initiatives. Until the 1980s, the approach of central government has been to stress the value of teachers as agents of change, the importance of local autonomy and diversity of provision and experiment. The strengthening and widening of the powers of the MSC under a Conservative government signified a move towards greater centralized control and direction, with more attempt to enforce policy goals than previously allowed



under a social democratic consensus. The effects of this shift towards centralized planning for gender issues still need to be assessed.

In the 1980s major contradictions can also be found between the liberal approach to equal opportunities taken by central government and its economic/social policies. On the one hand the close association between liberal ideology and policy on equal opportunities and the requirements of an inequitable economic system must concern those who wish to support concepts of justice and social equality. One could argue that the development of education policy has more to do with the needs of the state than concepts of justice (Finch 1984). Clearly such equal opportunities initiatives in education are also part of an economic strategy in which greater, though limited, investment in women is thought useful as a source of skilled labour, particularly as scientists and engineers.

On the other hand, the philosophy underlying equal opportunities policies sits uneasily under the umbrella of New Rights politics. Although it has hardly challenged social policies which support the maintenance of traditional patriarchal family structures and the role of the housewife mother (David 1984), some equal opportunities initiatives have indicated a need for social reform through educational change and the need to reduce, or at least temper, existing inequalities between men and women.

In the educational sphere, the choice of strategy for equal opportunity policies is undeniably complex. Central government strategies have tended to utilize concepts of individual freedom of choice and action, existing institutional frameworks, and professional understandings about the role and value of education as currently defined. However there is also increasing evidence that the greater the amount of discretion and freedom of choice left to LEAs, educational institutions, teachers and pupils, the more likely it is that traditional patterns will be reproduced, and the less likely it is that change will occur. Will compulsion at national level, through legislation or contract compliance, and at institutional level, through, for example, a compulsory curriculum, be the next stage of development? For some, such increased central control and 'intervention' has disturbing consequences (see Kirp, Yudof and Strong Franks, in this volume).

Other major contradictions have emerged between central government approaches to equal opportunities and their relationship to the grassroots women's movement. Feminist teachers have made a number of demands of education and of educational reform. Major transformations within education are needed, it is claimed, to challenge the hierarchies of the teaching profession, the structure of educational knowledge, conventional teaching styles, etc., particularly in so far as they privilege male interests. Such 'radical' perspectives and the activism they generate among teachers *in combination* with 'top down' liberal initiatives', according to Acker (1986), give the movement for sex equality 'a power unmatched by other reform movements'.

Others, however, take a critical view of such 'combinations', arguing that liberal policies of equality of opportunity are incompatible with feminist principles. O'Brien points out that

as feminism is committed to equality of condition rather than to equality of opportunity with its radically unequal reward system, many feminists . . . believe that liberalism is



not ultimately consistent with feminism. Despite the lip-service to women's rights and the quite concrete gains . . . which liberalism has grudgingly given to women, it remains fundamentally patriarchal in theory and practice (O'Brien, 1986, p. 95).

The fundamental conservatism of the education system will be hard to shift. Whether the impetus for change generated in the last two decades will be sufficient to encourage new, more committed, responses to sex equality among educational professionals, managers and politicians remains to be seen. The type of strategy needed for the reform of education, however, is still not clear, neither has the political will been evident.

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## Notes

- 1 By 1981, 49 per cent of married women were economically active (EOC, 1981a).
- 2 In 1978, for example, women with degrees or equivalent earned, on average, only 76 per cent of the income earned by men with similar qualifications (Reid, 1981, p. 211).
- 3 Between 1911 and 1971, there had been a decline of 11 per cent in women skilled workers and an increase of 22 per cent of female unskilled workers (Hakim, 1978).
- 4 See, for example, Rossi (1972) and Hewitt (1980).
- 5 The Helen Whitfield case, discussed in Rendel (1985), provides a good example of these problems.
- 6 The Equal Pay Act 1984 amended the Equal Pay Act 1970 to include the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, as a result of pressure from the EEC to bring UK legislation in line with Community law.
- 7 In 1984, Bromley Education Authority had to pay compensation to three female pupils who were made to remain in the same class for two years because the school wished to avoid a sexual imbalance in the year above. This represented illegal sex discrimination.
- 8 Wormald (1985) provides an interesting and detailed analysis of the implications for women teachers of DES policy on teacher education. She discusses DES, *Teaching Quality* (a White paper, Cmnd 8836, London, HMSO, 1983), Circular 3/83, *Initial Teacher Training: Approval of Courses* and *New Teacher in School* London, HMSO, DES, 1982. She argues that little attention is paid to the specific career patterns of women, their subordinate position in the school hierarchy, and the sex composition of the teaching force.
- 9 For another discussion of the effect of 'cuts' in education on women see Deem (1981).
- 10 Weinberg (1979) offers an interesting discussion of coeducation as an example of the 'politics of non-decision making'.
- 11 The SCDC recently published (together with the EOC) *Genderwatch: self-assessment schedules for use in schools*, devised by K. Myers, 1987 as its first major initiative on gender issues.



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# 11. Teachers and gender politics

*Gaby Weiner and Madeleine Arnot*

## Introduction

Teachers have played a central role in challenges to the traditional sexual divisions of schooling. Yet there has been no national survey of the extent of teacher involvement in gender issues and no evaluation of their achievements. This paper, though exploratory, attempts to set the record straight first by identifying the differences in teachers' approaches to the problem of sex inequality in schooling, and then by evaluating the range of experiments and implementation strategies devised.

We shall show how reform initiated by teachers represents the hidden level of gender policy formation, only becoming visible when part of national or LEA policy development. Academic researchers, the HMI, local authority advisers and inspectors, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), etc., all *rely* on teachers to see that desired changes in the education system are carried out. Teachers are often explicitly referred to as agents of change, though they are also frequently condemned for their perceived inability to move with the times (Wickham, 1986). Teachers' potential to initiate change and the long history of teacher-inspired innovation are rarely referred to or acknowledged.

Further, little attention has been paid to the personal and professional implications for teachers as change agents. Involvement in gender politics has had major repercussions for their experiences within classrooms and schools. Good relations with colleagues may be sacrificed when there are disagreements about the goals or strategies of school reform, or when colleagues display hostility to work on gender. Further, promotion prospects inside the school (as well as outside), for instance, in the allocation of special responsibility posts other than for 'equal opportunities', may also be affected. The political atmosphere of a school will also determine how far individual teachers become the 'token' equal opportunities specialists, or part of a general plan of working within the school.

Similarly, teachers' understandings about the nature of teaching or the most appropriate teaching styles have been challenged by their involvement in feminism or gender politics. No matter how committed teachers are to sex equality in education, they will find themselves questioning their own preconceived notions of what constitutes good classroom practice and good pupil relations. Trying to be 'fair' to both girls and boys in mixed classrooms, for instance, raises difficulties not only for indifferent or hostile teachers but also for committed teachers trained in certain 'progressive' pedagogical styles (Walkerdine, 1983).



Despite such difficulties, teachers have become more interested in gender issues at all educational levels, especially in secondary schools. The demand for information about work on gender reveals the extent of that interest (for example, the mailing list for the *Sex Differentiation Project* was the largest of all the Schools Council projects). What are the reasons for all this activity? For some teachers, their contact with the woman's movement has led them to ask questions about their workplace. Others volunteering for the first time for in-service courses on gender are not so 'politicized', but have become concerned about gender inequalities either because of their own experiences or through encouragement from colleagues and/or local authority policy initiatives. Many teachers retain a general interest in social inequality and the way it is shaped by schooling experiences.

Despite criticisms in the late 1970s of liberal beliefs in educational reform, and despite the lack of interest in social inequality (particularly in class inequality) shown by governments of recent times, teachers still appear to believe that education is an important 'site' and 'stake' of political struggle – that what happens in the school system is important. Teachers, if anything, appear to be now more aware of the contradictions of their positions especially when acting as reformers within, what some see as, an 'oppressive' system. Gender (and race) politics offer them chances to liberate not merely their pupils but also themselves.

The teaching profession in the late 1960s and early 1970s, was affected by the change of ideological climate brought about by the women's liberation movement in the United States and Europe, and the development of feminist ideas. In the UK, during this period, work with girls was carried out by individual feminist teachers; however, there was no real evidence of concerted teacher or government interest in combating gender inequalities in education until the Sex Discrimination Act (1975). The response to the letter and spirit of the law by teachers, particularly from those working in the metropolitan authorities, provided the basis for a teacher movement. This movement has constituted a major challenge to mainstream educational ideas and practice.

While, in the main, feminist teachers had relatively little power in the hierarchies of the education system, they were sufficiently organized to make their views known at a number of levels; for instance, by writing reports on the male bias of curriculum content and school organization, and by formulating school policy for presentation at school staff meetings; or by lobbying advisers or inspectors for resources to prepare non-sexist teaching materials (Myers, 1982; Cornbleet and Libovitch, 1983). Also, particularly in the days before local education authorities (LEAs) sanctioned work on gender, feminists working in different schools and educational institutions within the same or neighbouring authorities established *Women in Education* groups to provide forums for discussion, action and support.

The main focus of action for these teachers was on *practical* change; how could they help reduce inequalities between the sexes by changing their own perceptions and practice? They therefore focused on projects dealing with these issues within their own schools and classrooms. The considerable diversity of these projects, however, did not stem merely from the variety of locations and individuals involved; it was also based on critical differences in the perspectives of teachers.



## Teacher perspectives on gender and equal opportunities

A number of attempts have been made to classify these different teacher perspectives – for instance, Acker (1986) identified three major approaches, those of socialist-feminism, radical-feminism and liberal-feminism. In contrast Weiner (1985a) suggested a polarization between what she called 'equal opportunities' and 'girl-centred' education.

By the early 1980s the concept of girl-friendly schooling (i.e. making schools more responsive to the needs of their female pupils) was being developed by those concerned with equal opportunities (see Whyte *et al.*, 1985), while teachers committed to girl-centred schooling were developing 'anti-sexist' approaches (see, for example, Cornbleet and Libovitch, 1983). A number of differences between the goals, topics and implementation strategies of educational initiatives on gender could now be discerned:

Equal opportunities/girl friendly	Anti-sexist/girl-centred
Persuading girls into science and technology	Recognizing the importance of girl-centred study; for example, what is 'herstory', or girl- and woman-centred science or technology?
Providing a compulsory common core of subjects, to include 'hard' sciences for girls and humanities for boys	Providing girls with skills and knowledge to challenge the male system in the workplace and the home
Rearranging option blocks to reduce stereotyped choices	Giving girls a sense of solidarity with other members of their sex, and hence greater confidence and motivation
Analysing sexism in textbooks, readers and resources	Widening girls' horizons while not denigrating the lives and work of their mothers, female friends and women in the community
Reviewing school organization – for example, registers, assemblies, uniform, discipline	Changing the nature of schooling: replacing hierarchy, competitiveness, authoritarianism and selection with co-operation, democracy, egalitarianism and community
Producing in-service courses and policy guidelines	Exploring the relationship between sexuality, women's oppression and sexual harassment in school and the workplace
Establishing mixed-sex working parties to develop and monitor school policy	Establishing schoolgirls' and women's support groups
Creating posts for equal opportunities	Decision-making through wide consultation and collective working

Source: Adapted from Weiner (1985a), quoted in Arnot (1986).

Criticisms of this typology (e.g. Acker, 1986; Arnot, 1985) pointed to the difficulty, in practice, of identifying such clear differences in perspective or strategy. Teachers' initiatives often crossed over such boundaries and there were alliances between individuals and groups holding different views. For example,



schools, colleges and LEAs often used 'equal opportunities' rhetoric to develop girl-centred or anti-sexist projects.

Moreover the anti-sexist approach to education was adopted by feminists with different political affiliations. Consequently, there were also disagreements about focus and strategy *within* the approach. Black feminists were critical of equal opportunities and radical feminist initiatives which appeared to focus exclusively on the needs of white female pupils and teachers. Lesbian feminists were concerned about the heterosexual bias of most initiatives on gender. Socialist feminists, on the other hand, wanted to place more emphasis on the relationship between anti-sexist initiatives and the policies and pedagogies needed to challenge capitalism; and were ambivalent about the need for the development of separate strategies to deal with gender, especially if not linked to changes in social class inequalities.

Yet a common understanding united these groups, and provided a fundamental challenge to the 'egalitarians' – those advocating equal opportunities. This latter group, described by Weiner (1986) as drawing on the ideas of liberal feminism and equal rights campaigners, wanted to redistribute the rewards of education. In contrast the 'radicals' (i.e. radical, socialist, lesbian and black feminists), each in their own way, wished for no less than the transformation of the education system. They had no wish to ameliorate the existing inadequate education system: they wanted to transform its power base.

While central government has never been entirely enthusiastic about educational reforms concerned with gender (see Arnot in this volume), it was clearly much more tolerant of egalitarian strategies for change. The principal aim of egalitarian teachers was to improve the life chances of girls and women by equipping them, through improved schooling and counselling, to move into more highly paid jobs, hitherto dominated by men, and into senior management posts in education and other government or industrial institutions. The emphasis, within schools, focused on both pupils and teachers.

At pupil level initiatives concentrated on improving motivation (e.g. for girls to take up technology, and boys, home economics), encouraging wider subject choice at 13+, and attempting to diminish the perceived 'wastage of talent' in the case of 'academically able' girls who choose domesticity in preference to a career or paid employment. Emphasis was also placed on the improvement of teaching methods and the raising of awareness of issues of inequality through dissemination of research findings on gender inequalities and in-service work. While consideration of the needs of girls has been uppermost, it was argued that achieving equality in schools would provide benefits for *all* pupils. Such concerns are reflected in the HMI report on *Girls and Science* (1980):

If formal education is concerned, as it ought to be, with the identification of talents and skills of pupils across the broad range of the curriculum, then, in order to achieve their goals, all pupils – whatever their difficulties in a particular area, and irrespective of the origin of these difficulties – must be given adequate help and support . . . especially in science subjects where girls might experience greater learning difficulties than boys (*Girls and Science*, 1980, p. 2).

Whereas girls were encouraged to move into male-dominated areas of the



curriculum, e.g. science and technology, so that their job prospects could be enhanced, boys were encouraged to take up traditionally female subjects such as the humanities or childcare courses, so that they would become more sensitive and caring parents.

... just as girls do not grow 'naturally' into members of a dominated group, boys do not 'naturally' grow up to be oppressors. The whole process is learnt and much of this learning takes place in school where teachers must take some of the responsibility for the situation.

Growing up to be 'a man' – to feel superior, independent and self-reliant, to be the big boy who doesn't cry, places boys on the end of a sex-role bias as strong as that experienced by girls but which has different effects (Schools Council/ILEA 1983).

The 'anti-sexist' approach adopted by radical teachers was harder to incorporate in mainstream educational developments. It was too radical and 'confrontational' for some teacher activists, who argued that such a stance was more likely to alienate than persuade. Its influence was therefore only discernible in some LEAs (e.g. Brent, ILEA) where it received support from education officers and elected members.

The main concern of the anti-sexist approach was to uncover the extent of female oppression, generally and in schools in particular, in order to explore ways of *empowering* girls and women. Doubts were expressed about the value of policies of equal opportunities which deny or ignore competing educational (and economic) interests, and criticisms were made of policies of educational change which fail to acknowledge existing power relations; between men and women, black people and white, between heterosexuals and homosexuals/lesbians and between different social classes. Radical feminist teachers, in particular, aimed at placing girls and women at the centre rather than at the periphery of classroom life, and so challenged the dominance of male experience (Beecham, 1983; Cornbleet and Sanders, 1982). They emphasized the importance of transforming 'male' school knowledge and curriculum content, as well as changing school structures and organization.

Socialist feminist teachers also attempted to uncover the hidden sources and processes of gender differentiation and power within schooling, and supported the development of a critical feminist pedagogy to challenge dominant ideological assumptions.

If we aim to transform the consciousness of our pupils so they can recognise the divisions ideology has created between race, class and sex then we will frequently find ourselves in conflict with the wider function of the school as a state institution serving the needs of our society – which means the needs of a capitalist and patriarchal society. We are faced with the problem of how to change consciousness within such a framework (Payne, 1980, p. 34).

Many socialist teachers chose, however, to devote their energies to developing policy within the teacher unions, rather than developing school-based initiatives; yet here too there were tensions in defining the 'problem' of gender (as we show later in this chapter).

Pressure from black feminists (see for instance Amos and Parmar, 1981, Brah and Minhas, 1985) led to an increased awareness among some teachers (particu-



Early in the metropolitan authorities) about the need to relate anti-sexist work to anti-racist policies. Parallels were drawn and alliances forged between anti-sexist and anti-racist work in defining sexism as a 'male' problem and racism as a 'white' problem. Black feminists urged teachers, particularly white teachers, to tackle the problem of racism, to gain an understanding of the experiences of the Asian and Afro-Caribbean girls in their schools, and to become aware of the different ways in which race, class and gender affect black communities. For example:

The accounts of physical and verbal abuse experienced by the community is endless and horrifying. Schools cannot ignore this overt racism in society, just because there appears to be no overt racism in the school. Schools still expect British Sylheti-speaking girls to adopt the culture and values of the indigenous population, despite the fact that both the curriculum and the hidden curriculum perpetrate racism. So if teachers are to develop and implement anti-sexist, anti-racist policies, they should listen first to what girls, like these British Sylheti-speakers, have to say about their own experiences of school and society (Patel, 1986, p. 54).

Sexuality, as a theme of educational debate, also became more important to feminist teachers in the mid 1980s. In taking up issues of sexuality within schooling teachers have initiated discussion about the relationship between heterosexuality, homosexuality, lesbianism and homophobia and were particularly successful in highlighting the incidence of sexual and verbal harassment in schools. By 1986, however, more sophisticated attempts to deal with prejudice – for example, courses in heterosexism awareness – attracted the hostility of some local parents and the DES (see *Times Educational Supplement*, 1986a and b).

Raising such highly contentious issues presented, not unexpectedly, problems of strategy as well as principle.

Do we concentrate on formulating whole school policies or focus on small, sometimes trivial issues? When do we take on the more contentious issues, for example, sexual harassment or male disciplinary procedures, and when do we opt for 'safer issues', for example registers in alphabetical order or girls wearing trousers all year (although having said that, we are aware that in some schools all anti-sexist issues are 'hot')? (Ord and Quigley 1985, p. 105).

Uniting the different groups using anti-sexist approaches was the recognition of 'struggle' as an inevitable by-product of attempts at social change. Emphasis on the value of collective action, support groups and networks highlighted the need for the development of strategies to deal with the opposition and hostility that feminist ideas are bound to attract. Frankie Ord and Jane Quigley reflect on this theme:

It is frightening how quickly we run into hostility or dismissive amusement when even quite small changes are suggested, and facing such reactions alone can be a daunting prospect . . . power is not given away . . . there will always be conflict and . . . we need to be prepared for it. Opposition takes various forms: aggressive personal attacks, the raised eyebrows of 'oh no, not this again', the stereotyping of one or two members of staff as 'the equal opportunities people'. In this situation a support group is both a retreat and a base from which to launch further initiatives (Ord and Quigley, 1985, p. 106).



Whatever the origins and ideologies of these different anti-sexist perspectives, a recognition of the significance of the unequal power relations between the sexes marked the critical difference between the 'radical' and 'egalitarian' traditions. Further, this difference dictated the choice of strategy. Teachers, like Ord and Quigley above, have had to make choices; between, for example, establishing senior posts of responsibility to organize and co-ordinate activities within school, setting up working parties to investigate issues and make recommendations to the staff and governors, or working at classroom level. The choice of strategy has also, to some extent, been dependent on the policy and commitment of teaching staff and LEA, and on availability of resources, though clearly these are linked. The *Developing Anti-Sexist Initiatives Project*, for example, took a strong 'radical' stand against setting up special responsibility posts, since these allowed individuals to advance their careers as a result of their work on gender, with potentially contradictory outcomes:

Within the hierarchy of a school structure, a senior teacher cannot fail to be divided in her loyalties between the interests of management and those colleagues who are trying to initiate change. The fundamental changes that are brought about by a feminist perspective on education, are in direct conflict with the power structure of the school. To appoint an individual to a position of power tends to contradict the nature of the work and necessarily subsumes it. So during the year 1981-2 it was agreed by the staff to discontinue the senior teacher post and for the women's group collectively to take on the responsibility (Cornbleet and Libovitch, 1983, p. 146).

Nevertheless, alliances between 'radicals' and 'egalitarians' have been forged because teachers needed support in the struggles they were facing, and needed to be optimistic that change was possible.

Radical and socialist feminists *do* work within education to improve the quality of girls' experiences, whatever their theories say about structures. And some liberals advance strategies of 'positive action', by which they mean giving special attention to girls . . . (Acker, 1986, pp. 67-8)

Teachers attempted to put gender inequalities on the school or college agenda using a variety of methods, often cutting across the equal opportunities and anti-sexist divisions mentioned earlier. So, for example, projects aimed at encouraging girls in science and mathematics used single-sex classes to provide a remedial 'catch-up' environment (see Smith, 1984); yet single-sex groups were also used to encourage more open discussion about sex-stereotyping and gender relations in school. Further, most of the projects focused on girls, although there was some interest in boys, particularly in boy-only environments (see, for instance, Mahony, 1985; Askew and Ross, 1985).

Clearly teachers wanted to be agents of change rather than instruments of an oppressive system. Also work on gender provided them with an opportunity to reassess educational values and practice, even at times of low teacher morale, cuts in resources and attacks on their own competence. In considering race and gender as the equality issues of the 1980s, they were reclaiming the equality debates of earlier decades, in order to initiate major educational reforms from within.



## Providing the evidence

For many, the choice of strategy depended less on principles than on the availability (or absence) of information about *how* to tackle the issues. The task of collecting information on the extent of gender inequalities in schooling and what people were trying to do about them was made considerably easier by academic research and official investigations sponsored by organizations such as the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), the Schools Council, the Women's National Commission (WNC) and individual *Women in Education* groups. Not only were these useful in providing the basis for informed approaches to change, but the networks and support systems established, for example, by the Manchester Women and Education Group's or Schools Council's newsletters (1981-3), helped to rescue beleaguered individual teachers or groups from isolation and sometimes, even, despair. Also useful for teachers were guidelines and suggestions for observation and data collection, so that teachers could conduct their own 'institutional evaluation', and provide local 'evidence' for the need for change (Hannon, 1981; ILEA, 1985; Millman and Weiner, 1985; Adams and Walkerdine, 1986; Adams and Arnot, 1986).

The desire of teachers for more information provided its own dynamic for change in schools and colleges. As Millman noted (1984), the more sophisticated school-based research became, the more schools required some form of co-ordination and contact with other local schools; to compare findings and to discuss strategies for reform. And increasingly, teachers and schools looked towards LEAs for political support and advice, or financial assistance.

By the mid 1980s a number of different strands of activity emerged within the teacher movement (see Arnot, 1986), although these activities overlapped. The most active teachers were likely to be involved in more than one. They were:

- a teacher-initiated changes;
- b action research involving collaboration between external researchers and practitioners;
- c teacher contact and communication networks;
- d initiatives undertaken by teacher unions.

### *Teacher-initiated changes*

Most projects, initiated by individuals or groups of teachers, were small-scale, and short-lived due to lack of 'official' support or commitment, with consequent problems of under-financing and resourcing. Moreover, the majority of the teachers involved were at the lower end of the school hierarchy, and from the secondary rather than the primary sector (though Brent, 1984, provided an indication of the potential for change at primary level). Yet these projects were important in that they provided the main challenge to traditional educational assumptions about gender; and they also offered insights into how teachers could develop their own educational goals and implementation styles.

Teachers committed to change faced a number of difficult questions. First, how could they impress on others the importance of gender as an educational issue, and convince the unconvinced? Second, what was the best way to promote change within an educational institution? Given the 'political' nature of the work, how far could teachers go in challenging gender differences in school and in society?



Should they set up projects to deal specifically with gender inequality and stereotyping, or would it be more fruitful to 'sensitize' the school as a whole?

The projects generally focused on the curriculum, on pupils' attitudes, on teachers' attitudes – or some combination of the three. Few dealt with the sex structure of the school management and teaching profession, since this was not seen as within the scope of teacher influence. Some chose to experiment with single-sex groups, some developed core curricula or altered the timetable to provide 'non-traditional' options; yet others provided career advice for girls or ran courses on gender relations in society. The choice of potential strategy was considerable (e.g. Adams, 1986a and b).

The Spring 1982 *Schools Council Newsletter* reported activities as varied as promoting girls' football (Havering), developing an anti-sexist core curriculum course for years one to three of a boys' secondary school (ILEA), and a 'Young Women's Activity Day' for the young unemployed in Coventry which demonstrated alternative possibilities for girls, 'that women can become skilled and successful at a wide range of activities from acupuncture to karate, from motor-cycling to popmobility'. Another newsletter produced later in the same year reported on experiments with single-sex grouping for mathematics and science in a Doncaster comprehensive, developing a 'sexually undifferentiated' core curriculum in a Northern Ireland high school, and Introduction to Industry and Girls into Engineering courses for Trafford girl pupils. The 'Equal Opportunities Activities Week' in a Leeds secondary school was fairly typical of many early initiatives:

Parkland organized a week of activities during October aimed at raising awareness of sexism at different levels through a variety of media. Photographic exhibitions of 'Women at Work and Leisure' were hired, together with films and videos for use on the Careers Day. Discussions included a Sixth Form Seminar, meetings with parents and a dramatic presentation to illustrate sex-role stereotyping. A 'multi-cultural day' focused on the special problems and experiences of women and girls from minority ethnic groups. Materials contributed by members of staff and pupils were on display throughout the week (Schools Council, 1982b, pp. 17–18).

One of the most common responses to the requirements of the Sex Discrimination Act was the establishment of 'rotating' craft courses ('craft circuses'), whereby all pupils received 'tasters' of the whole range of craft activities. Despite this, the patterns of subject choice among girls and boys appeared to have changed little since the 1973 HMI survey (Pratt *et al.*, 1984). Even the establishment of a core curriculum, adopted by some schools, only 'delayed the problem' (Orr, 1985) since girls and boys still opted for 'traditional' subjects as soon as they were allowed some degree of choice. A rather more contentious experiment, as we mentioned earlier, was that of establishing single-sex groups in mixed schools. For example:

The working party has produced a paper . . . which recommends that Maths, Physics and Chemistry are taught to single sex groups in the third year. Thus, the first major area of change has taken place and plans are in hand for videoing classroom interaction in Maths lessons and for testing boys' and girls' attitudes towards Maths and Physical Science subjects (Northcliffe Comprehensive School, Doncaster, quoted in Schools Council, 1982b, p. 16).



Claims were made that girls do much better academically when taught away from boys, though critics suggested that this may be due more to the extra attention that the girls receive than to the single-sex grouping itself (Harding, 1982).

Other initiatives concerned with supporting adolescent girls were established outside the school system, in youth clubs and girls' projects. Involving youth workers and teachers, these projects were avowedly feminist and united in their commitment to show that 'young women are alive and kicking . . . can achieve something in their lives, and play a more active part in controlling their lives' (Manchester Education for Women Project, 1984).

Attached in the main to the Youth Service, rather than to the schools or colleges, project organizers sought to redress the traditional male dominance of youth work by offering special provision for young women.

Girls' nights, groups or clubs aim to meet the needs of young women in ways in which mixed provision does not, through:

- offering facilities to girls and young women either not served, or inadequately served by existing provision,
- offering to girls and young women the chance to develop and value skills they already have and to try activities not usually available to them in a safe, unthreatening and non-competitive atmosphere,
- improving young women's self esteem, self sufficiency and self confidence through creating a facility where they can enjoy and value each other's company, and therefore themselves,
- offering young women the chance to explore and question the range of options and choices open to them (Foster, Carpenter and Rowley, 1984).

Such initiatives on gender, however, were often pushed out of the educational mainstream and many teachers remained unsupportive. In a study of teacher attitudes towards equal opportunities, Pratt found a large number of teachers (and more men than women) unsympathetic to the issue (Pratt, 1984). The main response of teachers was to stress that pupils or students should be treated according to their individual needs, not according to their skin colour, their country of origin or their sex. Teaching should be 'gender-blind', and schools and teachers should not be expected either to discriminate in favour of girls or to assume responsibility for social change. Stanworth (1983) called this belief the 'politics of non-intervention'.

#### *Action research projects*

Other projects drew on the experiences of educationists working in different institutions to help initiate change. Researchers, usually from higher education, worked with teachers to intervene in pupil subject choice or to develop curriculum materials. Challenging inequalities in education also led them to attempt to narrow the traditional distance between educational researchers and teachers. The best known projects of this kind focused on the curriculum choices of girls, and in particular, their level of interest in science and technology. The Girls and Technology Education Project (GATE) investigated ways of improving the curriculum and assessment of CDT, and developing 'good practice'. The Girls into Science and Technology Project (GIST) on the other hand, worked directly



with teachers, attempting to reduce sex-stereotyping on the part of pupils and teachers, and promoting 'gender-fair' interaction in classrooms, so that girls would feel encouraged to study scientific subjects.

The main difficulty for the GIST team was that of trying to work with teachers who were not already sympathetic to the goals and methods of the project.

The main drawback . . . was that, by and large, the teachers did not see girls' underrepresentation in science as a problem. Nor were they willing to re-examine their own values. Most teachers readily agreed that equality was important, but thought that it already existed, and that any residual differences between girls and boys were genetic. Since they did not accept that there was any sex stereotyping in their classrooms, many teachers did not see the problem as theirs, and did not feel motivated to search for solutions (Kelly, 1985, p. 139).

An unexpected spin-off for the GIST team, however, was the success of the dissemination of project ideas and strategies, and the impact of this on the project schools:

Publicity about the research project brings the problem into the public eye, and leads other teachers to define it as their problem. This reflects back to the original school, where teachers now feel they are receiving recognition for something that was previously considered an imposition. . . . Rather than being a nuisance, which distracts one from the important business of work in the schools, publicity becomes an essential element of action research (Kelly, 1985, p. 145).

Other research projects focused on working with, and supporting teachers already convinced of the need for change – in the hope of a 'ripple' effect spreading to others working in the school (see for instance, Millman, 1987). Equality of project participation was stressed by the *Girls And Occupational Choice Project* (GAOC) which chose to:

go for small-scale seeding in fertile soil; a small number of participating schools, with volunteer teachers and intensive research attention. We wanted to establish our role as facilitative only, in equal partnership with the teachers who together would be devising and implementing a curriculum unit. This, together with a hopefully shared political commitment, would ease the potential tensions typically found in the relations between researchers and teachers . . . (Chisholm and Holland, 1984).

The project therefore chose a 'participatory democratic' style in relation to teachers and researchers, and also identified itself as feminist in orientation, i.e. girl-centred, collaborative and non-hierarchical.

An alternative approach was to help teachers become independent researchers. May and Rudduck (1983) conducted a project in first and middle schools in Norfolk. The goal was to raise awareness about sex-stereotyping in the early years of schooling by encouraging teachers to explore the dynamics of their schools and to enable them 'to understand better their own practice as a basis for informing future curricular decisions'. Teachers volunteered for the project, and with the help of a skilled researcher designed and carried out investigations. The effects of such investigations, however, are difficult to assess. Would they have any long-term effect? Would the teachers continue with such research or put their skills to further use in the development of school policy? Could the data generated be useful for other schools?



Similar concerns confronted the *Schools Council Sex Differentiation Project* which adopted the teacher-researcher approach and did much to legitimize both the area and the method of producing innovation in schools (see Weiner, 1985b; Millman, 1987, for a more detailed discussion of teachers as researchers). The model of innovation and curriculum developed by the Schools Council was that of self-education and then collective re-education. Teachers first developed small research studies of their own, which replicated as far as possible social scientific methods of research and data collection. The findings from these projects provided the basis for changes of practice, within schools or individual classrooms. An account of the studies and evaluation of the changes made were then brought to the attention of school colleagues, usually through presentation of a report at a staff meeting. At this stage it was important to convince colleagues of the validity of the studies if the 'ripples' were to spread more widely. Millman noted:

When the research findings are presented to other staff and disseminated more widely throughout the school, data will be necessary to convince staff of the validity of the teacher's findings. Classroom research, particularly in the area of sex differentiation, is likely to raise some very sensitive questions and often teachers will find it hard to accept that their methods and interactions are sexist. In view of this, research findings will need to be presented in a full, thoughtful and objective manner so that teacher consciousness is raised as widely as possible. The 'success' of a teacher's research in raising consciousness is impossible to measure and often she will feel dispirited at the apathetic or hostile reactions within her school. At this stage it is important not to be impatient – attitudinal and behavioural change is a slow process (Millman, 1983, p. 31).

Building on this tradition, LEAs such as Brent and ILEA designed their in-service courses around the concept of teacher-researcher (see, for example, Brent Education Department, 1984; Adams and Walkerdine, 1986; Adams and Arnot, 1986).

#### *Teacher contact and communication networks*

The development of action research and teacher-initiated projects relied on access to information and advice about how to proceed. The existence of a network of teacher organizations was therefore critical in encouraging innovation and reform. Though it was evident that the EOC did not see its role as the initiator of a UK gender network (Meehan, 1982), the *Schools Council Sex Differentiation Project* attempted to construct such a network among teachers. Throughout the two-year project, it produced a series of newsletters for participant and other interested teachers, and also established an information centre with resources and materials produced by the range of gender initiatives of the time. The *Working with Girls Newsletter*, a similar newsletter series for youth workers, aimed at keeping workers throughout the country in touch with each other. This newsletter had several functions:

- \* to keep people aware of what is happening now, with new developments, and with debates and current thinking in the whole area;
- \* to inform workers about projects, conferences, seminars, training, resources and jobs, and provide general information relating to work with girls;
- \* to function as an arena for debate, opening up a dialogue around the 'whys' and 'hows' of girls' work;



\* to carry funding news and ideas, and practical suggestions for working with girls (reported in Schools Council, 1982a, p. 17).

One of the Schools Council's final publications was a directory (1983) of equal opportunities projects set up by local authorities, schools and individuals, which itself constituted a sizeable research effort.

However, for teachers distant from its London offices, such a centre had limited appeal. Instead, by the end of the 1970s, a number of regional teachers' organizations and groups had been established. They included:

- a *Teacher/subject groups*: Women in History, Women in Geography, Girls and Mathematics (GAMMA), Women in Computing, Women in Economics, etc.;
- b *Women in Education groups*: organized locally – in Hull, Oxford, Manchester, Cambridge, London, etc.;
- c *Resource centres and newsletters*: for example, the Women's Educational Resource Centre, the Campaign Against Sexism and Sexual Oppression in Education (CASSOE) and the Women's Education Group (GEN);
- d *Publishing ventures*: Schools Council/Longmans, Pandora Press, the Explorations in Feminism Collective/Hutchinson, the Open University Gender and Education series, etc.,
- e *Learning materials*: for example non-sexist books, films, exhibitions, teaching and in-service packs on different subjects produced by such groups as GAMMA, and the Campaign to Impede Sex-stereotyping in the Young (CISSY).

#### *Teacher union initiatives*

Teachers committed to change also came together in the teacher unions. Given the context of union work, they focused on different topics compared to the school-based initiatives, yet they faced similar obstacles – male-dominated union hierarchies, low status, inability to influence the union agenda, etc.

Since the sex discrimination legislation in 1975, union interest in equal opportunities has been patchy, though there has been some activity, particularly in the National Union of Teachers (NUT), National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) and Association of University Teachers (AUT), and also in the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) and the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association (AMMA).

NATFHE has established a national women's rights study panel, a structure of regional panels and produced, in 1986, guidelines on how to establish a joint union and LEA equal opportunities policy; the AUT set up a women's committee and distributes a regular and popular newsletter; AMMA sponsored a survey on women teachers' career prospects in 1985; and the EIS established, in 1980, an *ad hoc* Committee on Sex Discrimination in Education. Despite its blemished history on equal opportunities (see Oram in this volume) the NUT has set the pace for such work in the 1980s. Through its equal opportunities advisory committee and department at union headquarters, it sponsored a survey, *Promotion and the Woman Teacher*, with the EOC in 1981, and has run training courses for its women members.

These courses aim to promote women's self-development, particularly in relation to their careers, their more active involvement in the Union and their role in establishing equal opportunities within their individual schools (National Union of Teachers, 1986, p. 4).



It has also encouraged local equal opportunities initiatives, drawn up 'model' job descriptions, provided advice on maternity provision and developed a formal policy on gender equality in the teaching profession.

However, despite the large numbers of women members in the teacher unions, most of the top union jobs continue to be filled by men. This has led to the establishment of campaigning groups within unions to challenge male dominance. For example, in the NUT, a Women in the NUT group was set up in 1978, as a response to the low priority given to women's rights issues in the union, the 'ghettoization' of women in the lowest paid and poorly financed sectors of teaching, and the general domination of the union and its policy-making by men (*Women in the NUT Newsletter*, 1981). Such 'gender-blindness' was identified by Jones (1985) as a major structural problem of the union, a consequence of its unwillingness to respond to the needs of the majority of its membership. The 1984 NUT Memorandum was therefore significant in its attempts to deal with not just women's careers in teaching (for example, part-time work, maternity leave, job sharing, fixed term contracts and promotion) but also with the position of women in the union itself and with girls' and boys' education (NUT, 1984). Additionally union representatives on the Schools Council Secondary Committee and its sub-committee, the Schools Council Sex Differentiation in School Working Party (acronym SIDESWIPE) played a major part in promoting initiatives on gender within the Schools Council (Weiner, 1985b).

## Summary and conclusions

The strategies chosen by, and the obstacles facing, school-based projects on gender were determined by the level of support they received from teachers of different subjects, from heads and senior school management, and from LEAs and other educational bodies. The topics and methods adopted by the teacher projects were also shaped by the ideological perspectives of the teachers involved, whether 'equal opportunities' or 'anti-sexist'. Clearly, all such projects were also dependent on the enthusiasm of committed teachers, predominantly female and often in the lowest status and lowest paid teaching jobs. For these reasons, the long-term outcomes of many of these projects have been unpredictable. Nevertheless the commitment to a just future for their pupils, daughters and colleagues, the struggle and the optimism often hard to sustain in times of retrenchment, and an educational vision, marks this teacher movement out as a worthy successor to the campaigns for equal pay and the removal of the marriage bar in the first half of the twentieth century. Acker continues to be optimistic about future possibilities:

Whatever the difficulties encountered in introducing and sustaining feminist activities in education, the efforts of committed teachers and parents are likely to continue and spread as long as feminism survives. It is a paradox that although education provides the conditions under which people are channelled into limited futures, it is also the primary means for liberation and transformation. Feminists will continue to use it in a liberating spirit, in and out of school. The efforts of each feminist teacher and parent will be reflected in the generations to follow (Acker, 1986, pp. 72-3).

Important though this movement was, and still is, in the struggle for equal



educational opportunities, it is yet to be seen whether, given the short-term existence of the initiatives, the low status of the teachers involved, and its marginality to the main concerns of policy-makers, it is able to continue to apply pressure at local and national levels.

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# 12.

## THE CHALLENGE OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES: personal and professional development for secondary teachers

Madeleine Arnot

The concept of teacher development has particular connotations in the context of equal opportunities. For many teachers working on anti-sexist or anti-racist initiatives, the concept, for example, of individual career development contributes only a small part to their enthusiasm for this type of political project. The marginal status often given to equal opportunities in educational institutions, has meant that the major impetus for such work has been a strong sense of the need for social reform rather than personal benefit. Paradoxically the experience of some teachers has been, on the one hand, the development of their professional practice and on the other, the narrowing or limiting of their career prospects. For others, support from school management and local authorities has meant the opening up of new career routes, and possibilities to become teachers with special responsibility for equal opportunities, advisory teachers or even deputy heads or heads.

Teacher development in the area of anti-sexist and anti-racist work has also meant participating in an often painful process of assessing not just one's own teaching practice, but also one's personal assumptions and stance on issues of gender and race. It has meant giving personal time and energy to finding ways of improving school practice and organization and of allowing criticisms to emerge and be discussed constructively. For many, it has been the experiences of pupils and their insights rather than their own experiences as teachers which have galvanized teachers to fight for equal opportunities in their workplace.



In this article I shall report on one local authority's initiative in the area of gender. The focus will be an in-service course for secondary teachers run by the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA). ILEA's strategy for tackling issues of class, race and gender inequality involved not merely the formulation of policy but also the setting up of a range of supportive structures. The Equal Opportunities Unit, for example, was responsible for the formulation of policy particularly in terms of employment patterns, and for improving the participation of women and black people in decision-making in the authority. Responsibility for the implementation of equal opportunities policy in educational institutions was located in a new post - that of Equal Opportunities Inspector - who was to work from within the ranks of the authority's inspectorate. Together with a team of advisory teachers, the equal opportunities inspector, Carol Adams, sought ways of collaborating with institutions to implement policy. This work consisted on the one hand of advising, supporting and working with teachers in schools and colleges, and on the other hand designing an effective in-service programme which would encourage the growth of good practice.

In 1985 Carol Adams planned two courses as part of this in-service programme, which would involve teachers in discussing and studying gender relations in primary and secondary schools. The course for secondary teachers entitled "Investigating Gender in Secondary Schools" was set up as a twelve week course with three hour workshops, held on alternative weeks at a teachers' centre. Teachers on the course were also expected to undertake small scale investigations in school in the three hour free periods available to them during the intervening weeks.

The authority facilitated this model of in-service by funding supply cover for the 17 teachers on the course. Carol Adams and I acted as course organizers and tutors, but we also invited a series of speakers to contribute to discussions about gender research in schools.

Once the course was finished, the material generated by the workshops and by the teachers (written up by themselves) was collated into a Handbook for ILEA schools. It provided a



range of discussion papers, topics for workshops, projects ideas and reading lists, as well as examples of teacher investigations. Since it was intended as a guide to help teachers set up their own school-focused INSET projects on equal opportunities, it was distributed free to secondary schools in the authority. By 1988 well over 2,000 copies had been sent out.

In this article I shall describe the organization and teaching style adopted by this course and consider some of the personal and professional implications for the teachers who took part. Carol Adams and I, as course organizers, were also affected by the experience and I will be referring to the subsequent development of this initiative into a different series of workshops presented in 1987 and entitled "Equal Opportunities in Secondary Schools". Earla Green, a second equal opportunities inspector in ILEA, was also involved in planning and tutoring this course. The views expressed in this article concerning the nature and impact of these two projects are mine alone and reflect the transition of one academic from working within an abstracted and 'pure' world of higher education to working with the practical concerns of teachers. I consider, therefore, the experience of participating on these projects as key to my own personal and professional development.

Before analyzing the ILEA initiative, I shall first describe the political context of work on gender, placing the ILEA initiative in the context of LEA policy development on equal opportunities and secondly within the tradition of teacher-research used by those concerned with gender. I shall then be in a better position to outline the particular route taken by the ILEA project and draw some conclusions about equal opportunities and teacher development generally.

### **Equal Opportunities Policy and Local Authority Initiative**

By the end of the 1970's many Local Education Authorities had responded no more enthusiastically to the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 than they had to the Race Relations Act 1976. Although the performance of girls and young women improved greatly, with far more obtaining examination



certificates and university degrees than previously, the patterns of sex segregation in education remained. The 'hidden curriculum' of schooling had proved not to be amenable to reform through legislation, especially since the Sex Discrimination Act asked little of schools other than to remove examples of overt sex discrimination. Thus, many of the conditions in educational institutions did not need to change in order to fulfil the criteria outlined in the education sections of the Act. Further, the argument that resources were not available to extend the curriculum to provide equal opportunities, together with falling school rolls, had allowed institutions and local authorities to delay their response.

However, by 1983 the Women's National Commission survey of LEAs in England and Wales and regional councils in Scotland found that over half the ninety five respondents rated equal opportunities as important (WNC, 1983). Local authorities had started to use a range of strategies that varied from briefing heads and teachers about the legislation, asking schools to identify instances of discrimination in text books and curricula and take countering action, and convening working parties on the subject. Significantly at that time only 12% of local authorities or equivalent had appointed a teacher (or other person) 'to make a study of, or co-ordinate, efforts in the authority to promote equal opportunities'. Such personnel would be key figures in the implementation of the spirit and not just the letter of the law. They represented a first step to providing resources to tackle sex inequality and to legitimate gender as part of 'mainstream/ education policy.

Very many LEAs by the early 1980s had taken little to no action on equal opportunities. The WNC survey had shown the general lack of priority and resourcing given to this sphere; most LEAs were relying on schools and teachers to take some action. In-service training for school managers and teachers was not a national nor a local priority. In response to Circular 14/77 (DES, 1977), LEAs had also listed a number of constraints to implementing the Sex Discrimination Act. These included lack of resources, timetabling difficulties (often associated with marked variations in the number of boys and girls choosing different options), the reluctance of some pupils and parents to move beyond traditional sex stereotyped subjects, and the cultural attitudes of some ethnic minorities



etc. (EOC, 1979). However, the general impression gained from this set of responses as well as the WNC survey is that many schools and authorities 'did not feel they had responsibilities to change either the attitudes of their pupils or those of society' (EOC, 1979, p. 3). Indeed education officers were reported in Pratt et al (1984) as showing a certain complacency towards equal opportunities and a reluctance to take any positive action. They argued that either teachers and schools were already acting in a professional manner and ensuring equal opportunities, or they were already taking steps to improve their professional practice and should be left alone.

LEA policies which were being developed in the early 1980s were generally well within the framework of equal opportunities, with its concerns for equal access and individual achievement, the removal of sex stereotyping of curricular subjects and careers, gender-fair teaching styles etc. In contrast, many feminist teachers were working on anti-sexist projects which tried to develop a concept of girl-centred education. In this tradition, documented by Weiner (1989a) and Weiner and Arnot (1987), the initial focus of concern were the experiences of girls within a male dominated educational system. The school-based initiatives which developed from this political perspective often set a very different agenda, shifting attention to the more contentious aspects of schooling. For the first time, topics such as sexual harassment, sex education, sex abuse of children, the experiences of gay and lesbian students and teenage pregnancy became issues for investigation and policy. As a political stance and critique of schooling that went well beyond the equal opportunities framework, it challenged not just the distribution of knowledge or its access but also the power relations which underpinned those structures. Equal opportunities in this context referred not merely to curriculum choice patterns, getting girls into science and technology, or on teachers' and pupils' attitudes to sex roles, but rather to the gendered relations between teachers and pupils and between pupils themselves.

In 1985 the Inner London Education Authority took the unusual step of publishing an Anti-Sexist Statement (ILEA, 1985a) as part of its programme of tackling race, class and



sex inequality. As Frances Morrell pointed out in her introduction, the statement called attention to 'institutional sexism and unconscious sexist attitudes as twin barriers to genuine equal opportunities between the sexes'. The policy was designed to 'enable change on all fronts within a programme of action which caters for the different stages of development within anti-racism and anti-sexism in an institution, at the same time as acknowledging the links between them' (p. 3).

The 'radical' nature of this initiative could be found not merely in its explicit use of the term a 'anti-sexist', but also in its desire to relate together class, race and gender work in the Authority. Also, as evidence of its commitment to the policy, ILEA devised a number of strategies that included the preparation of 'implementation packs' appropriate for each sector (for example, "Implementing the ILEA's Anti-Sexist Policy: a guide for schools" ILEA, 1985b), and the setting of a 'delivery date' by which time individual schools should set out their own policies and programmes of action. The work of helping schools and colleges adjust to and develop policy in this area was the responsibility of the Inspector for Equal Opportunities and her team of advisory teachers.

ILEA's approach to equal opportunities showed a certain vigour that was a reflection not merely of its greater financial resources but also the political interest of its elected members and teachers. Interestingly the recent EOC survey of local authorities found that all but two of the London Boroughs and three quarters of metropolitan districts had equal opportunity policies; Labour controlled authorities were also particularly involved in this area. (EOC, 1988)

However, a far more significant factor in the development of ILEA's anti-sexist stance was the pressure it experienced from committed feminists who persuaded the Authority 'to shift the official perception of sex equality from a fringe element within education to part of the definition of mainstream good educational practice and obligation' (ILEA, 1985, p. 5) For some ILEA teachers, this recognition of the work they had developed over a considerable number of years was all too thin (for example, Cornbleet and Libovitch, 1983). The presence of a considerable number of committed teachers



within ILEA also suggested that new ways of supporting their work in schools were needed. By 1985 Carol Adams had become aware of the need to develop a new style of course to bring together the insights of such practising teachers and provide contact with new developments in gender research. Central to her thinking was the necessity of moving away from authority based courses to school focussed projects on equal opportunities, undertaken by school working parties or individual teachers. The new style of course could also draw for its teaching style on a tradition of teacher-researcher and action research projects, the main focus of which was equal opportunities. The advantages of this tradition were that teachers were given time to develop their own thinking, practice and strategies and this could bring change closer to the site in which delivery was needed.

### **Teacher-Researchers and Action Research**

There is now a growing literature on the development of gender in-service projects using teachers as researchers in their own schools, and/or action research. Millman (1987), for example, reviewed a range of projects such as the Schools Council "Sex Differentiation in Schools" Project (1981-83) which established groups of practising teachers to investigate whether sexism was a problem in their own institutions. The goal of this National project was to:

respond to the stated needs of practising teachers; by exploring ways in which sex differentiation as an issue could be presented to their colleagues who were often unaware of the processes which reinforce sex differentiation and stereotyping in schooling; to provide information and resources, strategies and contacts which would be of use and value to these teachers already developing their own means of dealing with the problem. (Millman and Weiner, 1985, p. 12)

For this approach the main focus was school based practical change. The assumption was made that teachers on the project should be encouraged to choose their own topics and their own priorities for investigation. Similarly the



investigations set up by teachers working with May and Rudduck (1983) in primary schools chose their own subject matter with the academic researcher advising them on appropriate methods. This disadvantages of this approach however lay in the fact that, on the one hand, teachers might not consider topics such as pupils' employment experience or racial harassment without encouragement. And on the other hand, as Millman (1987) points out, some topics are more clearly amenable to study by teachers than others (e.g. use of play areas versus the influence of textbook stereotypes); and some research methods are more manageable and productive than others. Yet the results of such investigations, although very small scale and exploratory, have been useful in suggesting avenues for policy development, particularly for individual schools.

In 1984 this model of teacher-researcher was adopted by Hazel Taylor, as Advisor for Equal Opportunities for the London Borough of Brent, in planning a "Gender and Learning" course for committed teachers (see Taylor, 1985). Teachers on this course chose topics, in collaboration with their Heads and colleagues, and set up small scale research projects. The advantages of such a strategy were described thus:

The great value of teacher conducted school focussed enquiry, is that it illuminates the particular and leads to a consideration of how that particular may be improved. At the same time, it may give birth to a small doubt about the validity of some hitherto accepted generalisation about what happens in schools. A finding, coming up again and again in different classrooms in different schools, may point to the need for larger scale work to assess how widespread it is, and the variables which affect it. But also above all, small scale work provides space for individual voices to be heard, both children's and teachers', and to them we must listen. (Taylor, 1984, p. 2)

Three principles emerge from the teacher-researcher approaches. First, what stands out in such projects is the strong political commitment to promoting change. As Weiner



(1989b) argues, the tradition of gender teacher research can be differentiated from mainstream action research or teacher research by its commitment to 'increased social justice' - indeed success is defined in terms not just of the experience of inquiry but also of the practical changes produced. Gender researchers are concerned not merely with professional development and improved teaching practice, although those certainly are goals, but with making equal opportunities a professional issue.

Secondly, Weiner points to a strong belief in sponsoring a 'democratic' model of change involving practising teachers, as 'insider reformers'. She argues:

Teacher research has been important for feminist teachers since, by enabling them to explore the social and educational context of schooling within the framework of professional development, it has offered them the means of challenging educational inequalities from the inside. (Weiner, 1988)

The third principle of this tradition has been to break down the relationship between theory and practice, between generalizations based on traditional forms of academic work and the particular experiences of teachers. Various attempts have been made to 'make relevant' to teachers the insights of academic research on gender. The most common strategy has been to use academics as a resource for in-service courses, providing the background or context for particular issues. For both teachers and academics this strategy can be frustrating and is rarely totally productive. If change is to occur, the dialogue must be deeper.

New forms of collaboration between academics and teachers have been developed. The "Girls into Science and Technology" Project (GIST) for example, used a team of project members to collaborate with teachers and help design 'gender-fair' teaching styles, survey pupils' and teachers' attitudes etc.. Conflicts emerged between teachers and the project members on their interpretation of the projects' goals and success (see Kelly, 1985; Payne et al., 1984). The "Girls and Occupational Choice" Project (GAOC) also ran into similar difficulties, even though only 'committed' teachers were involved. The



main obstacle to progress identified by Chisholm and Holland (1987) was how to relate theory and practice - since that was the way in which the relationship between researchers and practitioners traditionally has been conceived.

### **Investigating Gender in Secondary Schools.**

In 1985 the twelve week course was advertised as one which would be of particular interest to teachers who wanted to extend and deepen their knowledge of equal opportunities and gender issues. One teacher from a number of secondary schools was encouraged to attend - all as volunteers. Because of the ILEA initiative, many saw their attendance as part of the schools' developing interest in the area. They hoped to return with ideas for policy development, though the course was not constructed with this in mind. Some teachers came with the support of the Head; others came from schools with a working group on gender anxious to hear more about the sessions and participate at a distance using the teacher's report back. Co-operation of colleagues was a valuable asset for teachers conducting investigations. One teacher found for a photography project on use of school space:

Two other members of staff became involved in this session, as a result of my asking for advice, and offering to take the photos for me. One took photos outside in the school grounds and the other took photos in the staffroom. When they approached me later with the photos, both indicated that it had been quite difficult for two reasons. The first was connected with the practical aspects of the task ... The second problem was to try not to let expectations become self fulfilling ... Both the teachers were dissatisfied with their efforts and wished to repeat the exercise at a later date ... They felt that the small number of photos taken could not be the base of any generalised conclusions and that a much larger number needed to be taken. Nevertheless their interest and followup discussion were in support of the idea that understanding grows out of involvement and interaction with people and ideas. (Adams and Arnot, 1986, p. 40)



By and large, the motivation of the 17 teachers on the course was strong and much enthusiasm was expressed at the workshops. For those teachers who had the interest in the course 'back home', the incentive to participate was more than just individual professional development or the gaining of personal expertise.

The course itself was organized according to a number of principles, some of which were dictated by the circumstances of the participants and others by a very specific theory of gender. The circumstances of the teachers meant in effect that no simple theory of gender could be used. Teachers on the course were working within a wide range of inner city secondary schools, with different gender, social class and ethnic pupil populations. Even more significantly for this course, four out of the 17 teachers were in single sex girls' schools. Such diversity would make possible fascinating comparisons of school experiences and yet also provide a challenge, in that most of the research on gender had focussed almost exclusively on co-educational settings. This had left teachers in single sex schools with few clues about how gender issues concerned them and their pupils. The pressure from ILEA to formulate school policy meant that a broader gender analysis was required than that currently on offer.

The solution to this problem was to be found in the theory of gender espoused by the course. The focus was to be on the girls themselves, rather than school organisation, the curriculum, teachers etc.. We hoped that by investigating the girls' lives in the school in which they worked, teachers could, on the one hand, bring forward issues that were relevant to the girls' lives in the school in which they worked, as they experienced them and find policies therefore that would have a more realistic chance of working. The active involvement of pupils in the construction of sex equality policy was rare. Indeed it is interesting to observe that a collection entitled "Girl Friendly Schooling" (Whyte et al, 1985) contained no examples of ethnographic research on girls themselves nor any research on what policies they might wish to see.

The advantages of focussing upon girls' experiences as the



theme of the course were three fold. First teachers could consider how they themselves related to the female pupils in their school. Many feminists have believed that they already 'know' what girls require by way of anti-sexist strategies. Yet how valid were such generalizations for the particular female pupils the teachers came into contact with? Also if feminist projects and initiatives were being met with hostility or indifference by girls, perhaps it was necessary to look more deeply into their lives and the context which they had to make sense of. It was all too easy, for those anxious to reform schools, to give up with despair at the apathy of female pupils and blame them for their predicament. Whilst the 'pathological' approach of 'blaming the victim' is well described in the case of black girls (for example, Parmar, 1981), it is less well recognized for all female pupils. The stereotypes of woman as passive, traditional and conservative, or those of parents as 'sexist' would easily come into play in this context.

Secondly, investigations focussing on girls had many advantages for the girls themselves. Work on single sex classes for girls in mathematics has indicated that female pupils respond well to receiving special attention, especially if normally silent in class. Taking groups of girls or individuals out of class to do something special with a teacher, especially being asked about one's personal feelings can become a positive intervention. This was certainly the case when one teacher, together with a black colleague, took a group of black girls aside to discuss their experiences in school. They talked about what it meant 'to be black':

Y:                   It's important to me but I don't know why.

B:                   Well my Mum's middle class. I feel white when I'm with white kids, but if I hear anyone call me coloured I hate that. I'm not coloured. I'm black. I'm not blue. I'm not yellow. I'm not pink. It's really insulting. We ain't got all different coloured stripes. But most teachers will say coloured



people do this or that. It sounds as if people are actually talking about you, not as though you are actually living. (Ibid, p. 60)

The investigation had a particularly strong impact on the white teacher who learnt not just about her own use of language but also the impact of calling a person 'coloured'. The girls themselves found this discussion helpful.

Teacher: Is it useful to have discussions like this?

A: It's interesting, useful. You find out what other people think.

Teacher: Do you ever discuss these things among yourselves?

A: Not really.

Teacher: You don't think we're prying?

A: It makes us think. It makes us realize about being black. There should be discussion groups and it should be timetabled like tutor periods. (Ibid, p. 60)

In another, different instance, a teacher had observed a technical class where there were few girls. She had little idea about what female pupils experienced in such lessons, particularly as the classes were held in more isolated buildings. Her interest and curiosity in the girls' experience produced a lot of pupil response and comment. Her positive enthusiasm for their work and the fact that she was 'envious of their skills' caused her to comment

Perhaps this is one method which might be considered as a positive reinforcement of the future potential to girls studying technical subjects, while there is still such an absence of female, technical teachers. (Ibid, p. 105)



The third major advantage of focussing the course on girls could be found in the range of new topics, ideas and resource material offered to teachers, particularly those involved in social studies or personal and social education. Subjects such as teenage pregnancy, sex education, lesbian and gay pupils' experience provided new topics as one teacher on the course found:

The gender course inspired me to set up the Personal and Social Education course for the third year. First I talked to girls and as deputy head of house, I became concerned about the lack of a pastoral curriculum in the school. So with another member of staff I began to plan the PSE course which now takes place in single sex groups in the third year. We wanted small; groups, and I felt that the girls needed space to talk and work without having to deal with the boys ... We worked with a very committed group of staff and that is also essential.

Both boys and girls spend some time on assertiveness training. The course also includes sex education, racial and sexual harassment and involves consideration of gay and lesbian issues. (Ibid, p. 152)

What the course offered to teachers were also ideas about how to broach such difficult and sensitive topics with pupils. One teacher, for example, discovered that although she knew a group of 12 fifth year girls well, when she asked them about their views on pregnancy she had great difficulty drawing them out.

We discussed the case of the 6th former who was pregnant the previous year and stayed at school throughout the pregnancy and after the baby's birth continued her studies. I think that it was just accepted, as they are keen to leave school, they felt that she was mad staying on and in her circumstances they would have left school quite happily. They felt the school was quite 'trendy' in allowing the girl to stay. Questions about the



father were not answered at all. They did not take the whole subject very seriously, and their seeming casualness was to do with the way they felt they ought to behave. I suspect that in the situation their responses would be quite different.

This teacher also realized that she had a moral obligation not to begin such discussions without a follow-up. The project revealed the limitations of a short course on gender issues, introducing topics that required a permanent place in school development. As the teacher commented

I felt at the end, and on writing this, that I had been a bit irresponsible. I should, I think, have followed it up and maybe I will if time allows. One of my real concerns in doing this kind of investigation is that possibly pupils are asking for advice and by not really being skilled enough in the technique and by perhaps being too concerned at looking for things to report back on, I lost a lot of the hidden messages. (Ibid, p. 158)

The focus upon girls also contained a specific number of premises which were spelt out at the beginning. These challenged the view that girls were passive recipients of their socialization - a view found in so much of the writing about gender. The course was designed to alert teachers to the varied responses by which girls made sense of the contexts in which they lived and the messages they received. They were presented as actively constructing their own lives. Drawing on the work of, for example, Anyon (1983), McRobbie (1978) and Arnot (1982, 1984) we encouraged teachers to take a less simplistic view of how gender identities were constructed; socialization was to be seen not as a linear process from birth to adulthood, but as a complex set of experiences that can be contradictory, and simultaneously progressive and conservative. Further, definitions of masculinity and femininity, whatever the cultural or ethnic origins, whether working class or middle class, were presented not necessarily as coherent or static entities but as the product of social struggle. What was important for those involved in gender issues was, therefore, to search out the structures and ideologies which shaped individuals' lives and begin to



understand patterns of behaviour as ways of mediating those structures and ideologies.

### Challenging Hierarchies

"Investigating Gender in Secondary Schools" aimed to offer teachers a different kind of experience, an experience which would entail becoming involved in the breaking down of hierarchies and boundaries that exist within education. The first significant division in terms of this course were the hierarchy between theory and practice, between those who are said to produce knowledge about education and those who work within schools. Here it attempted to find ways of applying the insights from academic research in an unthreatening way which would also credit the insights of teachers themselves. In this way, teachers would acquire the confidence in their own abilities to perceive, investigate or develop strategies for reform in the gender sphere.

Secondly the division between teacher and taught, it was hoped, could be challenged through the use of teacher investigations into pupils' lives, their own meanings and ways of making sense of school life, as well as through challenging the dichotomy of the personal and the professional. If teachers could understand their own experiences as men and women in the context of this course, then perhaps they could find alliances with pupils and break through the barriers between teacher and pupils. After all, if teachers themselves find it hard to modify their own expectations about sex roles, then why should pupils find it any easier? The way forward we believed was not to seek answers to the problems of gender but to generate new questions. There was a sense in which one had to start again at the beginning and ask more complex questions about the nature of schooling, rather than merely provide 'do-able' reforms.

I have already discussed the problems encountered by projects and courses which have used academics to provide the necessary 'overview' of current research. In this course a different strategy was taken to bridge the gulf between academic and teacher knowledge. First, and most significantly, the combination of an academic and an equal opportunities inspector both tutoring the course legitimised



the proposed relationship between research and teaching practice. It also presented an image of the course as being one that was serious and 'advanced'.

Secondly, students were provided with a reading list and copies of articles to read before each session. The articles were drawn from contemporary research and provided as often as not, examples also of the sorts of research methods used to study gender. The readings were received with great enthusiasm by teachers on the course, not the least because they wanted recent relevant literature and professional updating. Further they offered teachers the chance to read current research for themselves, rather than receiving a 'potted version' as is so often the case on in-service courses.

The research literature was also the topic of discussion within the fortnightly workshops. Often questions raised by a theme such as "Male culture in schools" were introduced in an opening talk by either a guest speaker or one of the course tutors. Teachers were then asked to discuss in small groups a range of questions about whether the patterns described in the article(s) could be found in their own institutions. The session, for example, asked teachers to compare incidents of sexual harassment, the sorts of strategies already adopted, the slang terms used by different types of girls and boys etc.. Such discussion had the effect of valuing teachers' own experiences - they were not de-skilled by continuous references to the importance of academic research. The contrasts between schools revealed by such discussions were considerable and fascinating. They demonstrated the importance of qualifying statements about gender relations by class and race.

The model of teaching attempted, therefore, to move away from what Freire (1972) called the 'banking' model of education, where a tutor is constructed as a depository of knowledge and students acquire 'baggage', that often has little direct relevance to their lives. Instead, a dialogue needs to be established in which teachers (as students) could appropriate knowledge for themselves and become active in the production of both information and theory.

A key aspect of this process, therefore, was the setting up



of small scale investigations into pupils' lives, where teachers might gain confidence in their own abilities to generate knowledge for use in schools by trying out a range of investigative methods. The suggested methods covered interviewing, questionnaires, diaries, 'problem page writing', audio-visual material, group discussion/photography etc. One of the most popular methods, however, was classroom observation. One teacher found when she observed a History, Maths, Physics and Chemistry lesson, that the colleagues in her school were prepared to allow her to observe their teaching and to give their comments on her observations. Her confidence was clearly heightened by this interest in her project:

My classroom observations sparked a lot of interest, particularly within the Gender Working Party, but also with a number of other individual teachers. Members of the Working Party wanted to do their own investigations into a number of areas which followed on from the ideas I had used.

It is interesting to note the value placed by staff on time to do investigations, and resource preparation, rather than money to be spent on manufactured resources. Other teachers on reading my reports wanted to be observed so that they could become more aware of the hidden messages they might be sending out towards pupils. (Ibid, p. 105-6)

It was a goal of the course that teachers might, in a very small way, feel that they could themselves be consulted as 'experts' within their own schools. Firstly, they could receive some positive reinforcements from other participants on the course when they reported back each week on their investigations. But it was hoped that teachers, once the course had finished, might begin processes of change in their own right. In a project on sex education, for example, this process of gaining consultancy skills seems to have succeeded. The teacher analyzed the texts used in her school, exposing not merely conventional attitudes towards sex roles but also racism and heterosexism. On her initiative a joint meeting of the science department and second year pastoral heads was



specially set up to discuss school practices in this area.

The advantages of such investigations for teachers who were asked to 'get their hands dirty' in trying to unravel the complexity of girls' school experiences was also in terms of breaking down the barrier or hierarchy between teacher and taught. The experience gave them on the one hand a more realistic awareness of the difficulties of trying to uncover gender experiences through research, and on the other an awareness of the difficulties teachers face in getting to know their pupils at an intimate level and of the lack of information about, for example, pupils' home lives. As one teacher pointed out, she was amazed at the boredom of the first years' home life revealed through pupils' diaries. In contrast another teacher was surprised to discover the extent of sexual harassment outside the school gates, which seemed to put into perspective the commonplace examples of harassment in school. The fifth year girls told her about their experiences in the following discussion:

J: That (sticking one finger up).

D: That gets on my nerves. They (men) touch you on the stairs, push and run away.

J: If you are on the tube, they push past you so that they touch your tits.

D: And businessmen with umbrellas. If you come home at five or six o'clock the business men from the City, they're wagging their umbrellas at you.

L: This car pulled up by me and he was stroking himself.

Teacher: How often do boys in school harass you?

D: Verbally all the time, they're



always saying something to you.

J: Not so much now.

S: In the third year it was worse.

Teacher: Physically?

J: Like when you go to science they put their hands on your seat so you sit on their hands, and they pinch your bum.

Teacher: What do you think should be done about that?

D: You can't really say they should stop it, cos you can't.

Teacher: Why can't you stop it?

D: Cos you can't. It's not as if you could have a teacher watching you all the time so that no one touches you. It's not as though you can do that.  
(Ibid, p. 74)

Clearly such investigations also had their limitations, not least of which was the smallness of scale and the lack of time and resourcing to produce more 'scientific' results. Colleagues, therefore, could question the validity of the teachers' findings, unless the exploratory nature of the course was upon girls' lives in school, with only one project on teachers' attitudes at the end of the course, there was always a danger that hostility from colleagues would be a problem. The advice we gave to teachers in the Handbook stressed that such investigations could be positive if the following guidelines were heeded:

- begin by looking at gender differences rather than looking

- for sexism;
- feel confident in your expertise;
  - decide whether you prefer to work with a group of pupils you already know or a less familiar group;
  - be open with your colleagues about what you are doing and try to involve them;
  - do not try to be comprehensive, covering everything, but regard the investigations as 'ways in' to get the ball rolling;
  - once you have carried out some investigations it is important to consider how it can be used with colleagues. It is very valuable to get colleagues' responses to such evidence so that a three way dialogue is set up, involving pupils, teachers and the teacher researcher/observer. (Ibid, p. 10)

From one point of view it mattered little if such investigations did not work or produced bland results. The activity itself revealed the difficulty teachers faced in investigating, for example, areas of privacy, confidentiality issues (such as illegal youth employment), race and class differences as perceived by pupils. If some increased understanding of what it is like to be a female pupil in their school could be achieved, the pay-off would surely come in terms of improved teaching practice and school organization. The implicit goals of professional development were in terms of a more informed practice and an 'open minded' school environment.

Certainly one project demonstrates the value of initiating such investigations. In discussion with second year girls in a single sex school, a teacher was shocked to discover the range of abusive or swear words used by girls - words which Lees (1986) had identified as part of male pupils' culture and their method of degrading women. Similar terms such as 'slag', 'slut', 'whore', 'dog', and 'fish' were used by the group of 12 and 13 year olds without much reflection as to the meaning such terms conveyed. As one pupil commented



You say we might put down other women but if this arises, Miss, you meant to, you got to do that. Sat if another girl calls you a whore for no reason you gotta then say something like that back in't it. All right, you're putting women down again, but they deserve it. (Ibid, p. 128)

After taping this discussion, the teacher followed up her project and talked to the girls six weeks later when she found they were less embarrassed. They had reflected on her points and yet admitted that they were not yet able to stop themselves from using such words. Increasingly, they felt that they could not have had this kind of discussion with their form tutor to whom they talked about different things every day and said they related to her as a "Mum". The project it seemed would continue with the teacher putting new questions to the group about relationships with boys, parents etc. As she commented:

I would like to record and write up what comes out of these discussions and feel it has been a valuable part of the course. The ideas have come directly from the girls involved in the discussion and may perhaps be channelled in a positive direction for some of them. It is important not to leave this kind of discussion high and dry after starting to get the young people interested and involved. (Ibid, p. 129)

Not only had the teacher gained from such an investigation but so too had the pupils and the relationship between the teacher and these pupils was put on a new footing.

### **Personal and Professional Development**

Three major strategies were adopted in the course to allow teachers to consider the ways in which gender relations shape school life, their own classroom practice and pupils' cultures. In the first session, teachers were asked to consider their own personal histories in much the same way as they would later reflect on female pupils' experiences. A key element here was the assumption that by understanding one's own

experiences of being a man or a woman, by identifying the moments of rebellion and resistance, of conformity and acceptance, we can begin to understand the contradictions faced by others. Further, teachers' own educational histories - for example, experiences within single sex or mixed schooling - will shape the way they interpret and respond to the patterns of gender interaction within schools.

In the context of such a short course it was impossible to do more than begin that process of self evaluation and reflection on the personal aspects of teaching. Each teacher was asked to write down their own experiences, as they remembered the key events in or feelings about their secondary education. For a few, the activity was perilous since their childhood was filled with painful memories. Ideally, some support is needed to allow individuals to express her/his feelings about such an activity and individuals should be allowed to 'opt out' if the process of writing is too traumatic.

On the other hand for some teachers the task of writing down personal experiences in this way was an enjoyable and useful exercise. One teacher, for example, recorded her Catholic schooling - the relentless rule following, the fear of the teaching staff, the all-female culture of the school and the ways in which any references to sexuality were squashed. Yet in her account one also finds the extraordinary impact of one 'Sister Carmel' whose influence was 'absolute':

She was so clever, I used to say she thought like a man. The models of intellectual mediocrity I had experienced up to that point (though I could never have identified that then) were replaced by a clear-thinking but intuitive, highly qualified woman.  
(Ibid, p. 34)

Conformity for this pupil brought with it positions of leadership. She had learnt to balance academic ambition with the requirements of a suppressed sexuality until such time as she left school. The fine line drawn by pupils between conformity and resistance were also clearly identified in another fascinating account of a teacher's schooldays.

The alternatives of academic success and female sexuality



(identified so clearly by Middleton, 1987) can be repeated in this account. Here, attending a mixed comprehensive in North London and acting as Head Girl, the teacher found that success was painful:

I had spent (the first three years) in the top of six streams and spent much of free time explaining my way out of fights with girls in the lower forms; explaining that I didn't agree with the system either, and it wasn't my fault I was in the top stream. I wasn't any different from these girls except I loved reading books which meant all the other things that tend to be connected with reading. In fact I knew I was awful at Maths and couldn't spell and I knew that some of the girls in the lower streams were better at things I would never be good at. And yet I conformed and didn't moan. Although I did start to rebel in certain lessons I couldn't do, as it was far less soul destroying than trying to do the work and it meant I could get the admiration of the boys. (Ibid, p. 26)

Wanting boys to notice and to admire one was clearly as important as academic work to this woman teacher, even if boys did not 'fancy' her, at least she could get them to respect her and help her lose her reputation as a 'swot'. She became by her own admission a 'disruptive pupil', particularly in lessons such as Maths which she did not like. But there is also another memory:

This time pleasant. It is of the calm that used to fall over the classroom in Needlework and Domestic Science. I remember thinking that it was good to be away from the boys in these lessons. Whatever domestic traps there were preparing/enticing us to slip in to, within the school they gave me, and others, I'm sure a chance to value feminine skills and to taste the delight of being together alone with women ...

The relationship between her own experiences and those of her pupils in school was not lost on the teacher. She concludes her account:

I'm sure this piece of writing is influenced greatly by what I feel now about girls and education, but I was aware of injustices when I was a girl in a mixed school, and hurt by them, and angered by them. What is sad now is that things have changed very little for girls in mixed schools nearly 16 years since I began at Arnos. (Ibid, p. 28)

Another activity used on the course was one which focussed attention on teachers' experiences within single sex or co-educational schools. Since the 1960s the shift to coeducation in the maintained sector, with comprehensive reorganization, has considerable implications for teaching practice. Arguably teachers who had themselves attended the same type of school they found themselves teaching in, even if they had negative impressions about their own school experiences, would nevertheless feel some familiarity with the underworld of that type of school. We asked teachers therefore to reflect upon whether their own experiences of single sex and/or mixed schools affected their teaching strategies and whether they felt comfortable with the opposite sex. However, in one account of a teacher's travels through the ideologies of mixed and single sex secondary schools, it became clear that such questions were too simplistic. Class cultures had clearly affected her impressions of the value of two different girls' schools and a coeducational school. Having passed the 11 plus, she was sent to a girls' school whose Head in her introductory talk told the girls to 'hold our heads up high and behave like ladies'. Contrary to some feminists' belief that single sex schooling provided the answer to sexism in education, this teacher recounts how:

It didn't take me long to become fed up with the tedious rules which symbolized so much silliness, so many oppressive expectations of us as young women. No girl was allowed to eat out of school in school uniform ... I remember that, along with others in my group I was outraged when we had our first knicker inspection, which consisted of the Head parading around the hall during an assembly one morning and lifting up girls' skirts at random to see whether they were in fact sporting the atrocious maroon numbers.



Having moved to London, the teacher was then placed in a mixed comprehensive where the impact of class and gender was experienced even more vividly:

My overriding memory of this institution was the size of it and how I felt in it ... the other pupils mostly seemed to be "rough sorts" - working class is what I mean. Most of the girls ... in the school were sexually harassed both inside and outside the classroom. I would often get my breasts fondled by a boy or boys as I handed out books in a lesson. It was impossible to walk around the school without a boy putting his hand up my skirt; the indignity of that made me feel alarmingly insecure. I can't remember feeling angry or complaining about this any more than any other girl did ... I longed to be able to wear trousers.

(Ibid, p. 34)

By the end of her 5th year, the teacher had moved to a Direct Grant girls' school where she found a certain happiness. Loving the fact that the school was small, all-girls and the quite studious atmosphere where she didn't have to hide 'my middle classness', she was able, in her own words, to 'turn things round to her advantage'.

Such accounts bring to life the concepts of public and private accommodation and resistance described by Anyon (1983). They provide new entry points for teachers to consider the silence and reticence of their female pupils to break sex stereotypes, the sexism within single sex environments and the patterns of male dominance in mixed schools. Such experiences show how gender definitions are 'worked on' rather than acquired through merely the stereotyping of textbooks, curriculum differentiation or teachers' prejudices.

Another way of investigating gender in secondary schools and developing a more sophisticated analysis of the part played by schooling in pupils' lives is to start to 'decode' the structure of schools and discover the messages about gender contained in the organisation of teachers, pupils, curriculum,

the use of space etc. Drawing on the work of Bernstein (1977) we encouraged teachers to consider the structure and patterns of interaction in the classroom, playgrounds and corridors and consider how girls experienced social control. For example, male and female use of space in playgrounds and staff rooms, male and female seating arrangements used for different school subjects etc., all provided information about the structural shaping of gender relations in mixed schools. Single sex schools could be examined in terms of how the male culture and presence affected girls' image of femininity.

As we have seen in some of the examples of projects already referred to, asking girls about their lives provided teachers with a useful perspective on the structural relations of the school: for example, the patterns of interaction between girls themselves or between boys and girls. Teachers found that images of masculinity and femininity abound in school. However, even more significantly, such images are only one set of many lessons learnt by pupils.

In a discussion with a group of 5th year girls from a mixed school in the East End, one teacher discovered the pattern of girls' part time jobs. In such jobs, girls experience sexism and learn about the division of labour in the 'real world', in perhaps a far more profound way than their school experience. The following is a short extract from the discussion:

Teacher:       What sort of job do you have?

S:               I work in a shoe shop serving.

K:               I work in the same shop as S.

N:               I work in a Pie Mash shop,  
washing up.

T:               My Mum works in an office, cleaning.

S:               Six girls work in the shoe shop  
Saturdays, and just one boy.

N:               About six girls and five boys



work in the Pie Mash  
shop. The put the pies in the  
ovens and the girls do the  
washing up and clearing tables.

S: That's wrong, boys should clear  
the tables as well.

N: Their job is easier because  
they just stand there putting  
pies in the ovens, but we're up  
and down all the time. They  
can take a break but we can't.  
They get more money than us,  
but we are not allowed to do  
that job because they say  
we're not strong enough. But  
I've done it, I'm not supposed  
to but I've done it on my own.  
I hurt my side but I didn't get  
anything for it. They're  
supposed to be tougher than  
me but I can pick up more  
than they can. (Ibid, p. 80)

Such 'evidence' reveals how paid employment (and domestic tasks in the home) are critical influences on these girls' lives. It puts into perspective attempts by teachers to try and break stereotypes and encourage girls towards wider horizons and less traditional routes. The limits and possibilities of educational reform are clearly demarcated by such 'evidence'. The reality of their parents' lives and work, their experiences of what young men and boys expect of girlfriends and wives, their own understanding of women's role in society militate against girls having any luxuries of academic ambition or non-traditional job expectations. In a poignant comment, a white working class girl shows the struggle she encountered between reality and fantasy:

Me in 10 years time? That's a joke. I'll probably be chained to the cooker with three kids yapping around my ankles. I hope not. I hope I'll be living in the Caribbean with a millionaire husband with

servants to wait on me hand and foot. I'd have a Porsche car and perhaps an old Rolls Royce to pop up the shops in. I'd have a new suit every day and my hair in a different style every week.

I'll tell you the truth now as you can gather the above paragraph was only a fantasy. In 10 years time I should think I'll be married, I might have some children. I hope to have a nice car ... My husband will have a good job, and we'll regularly go out to the pub or somewhere special. My house will be clean and I shall have nice furniture ... I shall also have a job, it doesn't have to be full time but at least it will be bringing in more money into our home. My job will probably just be a part time shop assistant or working mornings in a factory or warehouse.

If I see myself like that in 10 years' time, what's the point of me being here working like mad, getting as many exam passes as I can? It doesn't seem worth coming to school but you only get into trouble if you don't. My mum and most of the women I know have lives like this ... This is what will happen to me if I don't do anything about it, not that I'm complaining. It's a decent life for someone like me. (Ibid, pp. 89-90)

### 'Race' - the lost dimension

In this final section I would like to consider what was to become perhaps the most significant Aspect of "Investigating Gender in Secondary Schools". As the title suggests, gender relations in education constituted the focus of the course, with girls' experiences as the particular interest. The decision to focus upon girls clearly had its limits not the least of which was the exclusion of teachers from boys' schools. It was felt important at the time however to begin the work of exploration with girls and the move forward to consider boys' experiences. In the writing up of the Handbook for in-service workshops, however, we were more aware of the needs of teachers working in all male schools and designed discussion questions and projects to take this into account. The second in-service course "Equal Opportunities in



Secondary Schools" which catered for both girls' and boys' experiences attracted nine male teachers. Two deputy heads, one advisory teacher and one Equal Opportunities Co-ordinator from four boys' schools attended the course.

There were other difficulties with our initial focus on girls. As course organizers we issued a clear statement about the primacy of gender over class and 'race' in the title and the shape of the course. In so far as class relations were concerned however this proved not to be a disadvantage since much of the literature in this field deals with class. Also teachers were all too aware of their social class catchment and discussed important differences about girls' experiences in terms of, for example, youth employment (where middle class girls had few part time jobs compared with working class girls), experiences within school, and even patterns of sexual harassment.

In terms of race, however, the focus upon gender had very negative consequences. The first course only recruited two black secondary teachers perhaps because it was perceived as a course that was largely irrelevant to black women. The experience of 'race', of being a black person in British society, was for many black teachers' a more appropriate starting point for discussion than gender identity. Being black had shaped their lives in ways that were far more devastating than their experiences of being as woman (see for example Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe, 1985). Certainly on reflection, black teachers' avoidance of this course and its 'white' perspective was a major issue for Carol Adams and me as the two white co-ordinators. Whilst we had tried to integrate 'race' and gender in the course we had chosen to foreground gender and raise what we considered to be interesting gender questions.

Unfortunately that meant we had also selected academic material and topics in a sequence shaped by our view of what constituted white girls' school experiences. Hence we had started with topics such as co-education, and the issue of male and female relations that has less relevance for black feminists. We placed the discussion of race in the context of girls' youth cultures, using the work of, for example, Fuller (1983) to discuss the differences between the 'norm' of white girls' patterns of conformity and resistance to schooling and

the patterns adopted by black girls. Other topics such as sexual harassment, male dominance and school life, home life, images of femininity associated with the home, glamour and passivity were all to be discussed in the context of white culture, with little reference to the experiences of black girls in school.

By the third workshop the two black teachers had raised this structure and orientation as a problem and a discussion ensued amongst the group about how 'race' could be tackled in relation to gender. Some members of the group felt that there was a recognized need to have a course concentrating on gender issues, especially because schools were developing independent policies on anti-racism. There was some concern that if one inserted 'race' into the discussion of gender, then one would open the door to courses dealing with 'everything' at once (for example, disability, heterosexism, class etc.) Gender, it was argued, needed, and had fought for, its own space.

A key aspect of this discussion was whether any of the projects conducted up to this point in the course had taken issues of 'race' into account. It appeared that, in reality, none of the white teachers had elected to talk to black girls in their schools. They had selected pupils with whom they were on familiar terms and were comfortable. It was a sharp reminder how great is the feeling of distance between those of us who are white teachers and black students, how uncomfortable many of us feel about raising topics with black pupils and visa versa. Teachers on the course were concerned at what such lack of communication meant for their classroom practice whilst others expressed concern that by asking only black girls to come out of class to talk to them, they were in danger of labelling them as different and aggravating racial divisions. Such fears were not expressed in terms of taking girls out of class and antagonizing boys.

Many of us recognized the validity of the criticisms and were keen that projects with black girls were set up the next week. The transcripts of these discussions reveal not merely the extent of racism in the school but also the problems black girls face in finding support from teachers. For example, in one discussion with Afro-Caribbean girls in 2nd



year, they pointed out that despite school policies they found few positive images of black people in school and little help in dealing with racial harassment. Considerable courage was shown by the black girls and the white teacher in tackling such a sensitive issue.

E: Like when I first come to this school you know when you used to have our lessons on CI, library lessons, and I was helping with Scott and he kept calling me and Victor black muggers.

Teacher: What do you think school ought to be doing to stop that sort of thing happening?

G: Do something to them ...

Teacher: Like what?

M: More varieties of nationalities

Teacher: But particularly about people making racist remarks, that sort of thing, what should the school be doing about that?

G: Should go to another class

Teacher: They should be told off about it and ...

J and S: Yeah!

Teacher: But you see, no-one's come to me and ... I'm not blaming you at all, you know, but, no particular reason why you should want to but ... in that library lesson, you didn't come to me and say 'Scott's

been calling me this'

M: You probably thought that ...  
you wouldn't really  
understand, anyway, would  
you?

Teacher: That's what we were talking  
about before wasn't it? Why  
wouldn't I understand?

M: You wouldn't say things like  
that but you wouldn't  
understand how it feels to be  
called ... that sort of name

Teacher: Because I'm not black, and no-  
one's ever called me  
that?

M: Mmm

Teacher: That's a reason why black  
teachers would be a good idea  
because they could ...

G: Control sort of ...

Teacher: Well at least black kids could  
feel that there was somebody  
who understands them better

M: Yea (Ibid, p. 53-54)

In conversation with black girls, the members of the course identified many instances of racism, even where as the girls pointed out the school is 'supposed to be progressive'. Teachers were not seen as very helpful, particularly because of their lack of interest. Other pupils suggested that teachers themselves were involved in calling black people names. As one girl put it, if all those who were guilty of racism were to be expelled from school, 'You'd have to expel so many people you wouldn't have any pupils or teachers left.'



The implications of these discussions with pupils for teachers' professional practice were considerable. If teachers, even the most politically to equal opportunities, were having difficulties talking to black pupils or dealing with incidences of racial harassment, how could one hope to ensure a comprehensive policy on class, race and gender in schools - could they ever avoid the patterns of racial friction, as described, for example, in Cecile Wright's (1987) research? In so far as the course was concerned, what we had all learnt was not merely about the experiences of black girls in schools, but also about our own assumptions. We had identified the way in which we structure the world according to our own circumstances. In effect, we had set up a white woman's course, into which we have tried to slot black women teachers and black girls' experiences.

Such was the power of this critique that when writing up the "Handbook for In-Service Workshops", we found that the course had to be substantially modified. We placed the discussion of 'race' in the first major topic after the introductory sessions and designed projects to investigate not merely black girls' experiences but also for creating an 'awareness of racism'. Here the projects were to consider white teachers' and pupils' approach to 'race' and that of the school. We were aware, however, of the sensitivity of constructing teacher investigations in this area and advised the following:

Investigating in what ways racist assumptions and stereotypes affect your school is a very difficult task and one which needs to be handled with great sensitivity. It is a learning process for both teacher and pupils and we as teachers have much to learn from black pupils' experiences of racism. Such discussion is best done with pupils you know well. What the atmosphere is like in the school will affect how you investigate the issue. You may wish, for example, to begin to talk about a different topic and then progress into a discussion of race in Britain. You should not be looking for racist attitudes but trying to discover how pupils feel about this issue, what they experience in their neighbourhood etc. (Ibid, p. 49-50)

The appointment of a second Equal Opportunities Inspector, Earla Green, allowed for the possibility of re-thinking the original course and the Handbook in 1987 after numerous planning sessions, where we struggled with the structure of the course, its readings and activities, we presented a new course entitled significantly. "Equal Opportunities in Secondary Schools". The goal of this course was to offer to secondary teachers the opportunity of integrating class, race and gender. The impact of this shift in thinking was considerable. The course - this time only 6 weeks long and without any supply cover for periods of school-based investigations - attracted 39 teachers. This time teachers came from a range of 23 different schools, sometimes with four to five teachers from one school. Of the 22 schools, 15 were mixed, 4 were boys' schools and 4 were girls' schools. Even more importantly, approximately a third were black teachers. The involvement of a black equal opportunities inspector had clearly made a difference to black teachers.

The new course began from a very different starting point. The introductory session moved away from the personal analysis of teachers' personal lives to 'decoding' the structures of institutional racism, sexism and class. Here teachers were asked to consider their own institutions in terms of these three variables - we presented small groups and school prospectuses to analyze, and we discussed school culture, curriculum and examination routes, uniforms etc. Later sessions dealt with racism, sexism and class in the context of "Classroom Dynamics" (where we looked at examples of school profiling), "Family Stereotypes" (where we discussed various stereotypes found in schools), "Male Culture in Schools" and "Sexuality". Readings on 'race' were incorporated in every session and produced some of the most lively discussions we had seen so far.

## Conclusions

A number of issues have been raised in this article concerning teacher development, and the organization of in-service courses on equal opportunities I have discussed new methods for the organization of teaching on such courses, the sorts of teacher investigations and the style of school-



focussed in-service projects that can be set up in schools. The focus of the course on pupils' lives we believe provided a successful entry point for teachers on the course, particularly those not familiar with gender issues, or for those who were worried about the reaction of their colleagues to any anti-sexist work. We hoped that in the long run, an increased awareness of pupils' school experiences, the range of messages they receive about relations between the sexes and the structures with which they have come to terms in their daily lives both inside and outside the school, would help teachers reflect on the impact of their teaching and of school organization. Further, they could become aware of the requirements of an effective equal opportunities policy. The insight of Bernstein that

If the culture of the teacher is to become part of the consciousness of the child, then the culture of the child must first be in the consciousness of the teacher.  
(Bernstein, 1970, p. 120)

was one which perhaps best described our approach as course organizers.

Making gender a professional educational issue in the context of schools where it is still often assumed that both sexes are treated alike, or if not, where the differences between the sexes should be allowed freedom of expression, is an important goal. But it must also be situated within its own political context. The initial course "Investigating Gender in Secondary Schools" was a good example of the concerns of the mid 1980s when a few local education authorities had sufficient finance and political commitment to 'invest' in the development of equal opportunities. However, the political and financial climate has now undergone considerable reform. With the introduction of the Education Reform Act (1988), as well as the re-organization of in-service funding with more DES involvement in, for example, GRIST, we are likely to see a reduction of facilities available to support such anti-sexist work. The dismantling of ILEA also has particular repercussions for such work in Inner London. It is unclear how equal opportunities initiatives of this sort will now be established.

At the same time, courses such as the one described in this chapter have also played a key role in raising new issues for those concerned with equal opportunities. The need to integrate race, class and gender for teachers, at whatever level in the educational system, has become increasingly important. As we ourselves found, the time was ripe to bring together the insights and perspectives from these different traditions of research and practice. By working with teachers from different schools, we could begin to make some sense of the contradictions between the three sets of power relations. Teachers' experiences of trying to relate their practice to the demands of what had become separate policy issues were invaluable starting points for the development of equal opportunities work. Brah (1988) points out in her trenchant criticisms of feminist scholarship that courses and texts which focus solely on gender or use a feminist perspective which sees 'race' as synonymous with the 'Black experience', are likely to become 'chronicles of a bygone epoch'. She argues that the introduction of the National Curriculum with its nationalistic overtones, the construction of a British way of life has made it even more imperative that issues are addressed, not merely in multi-cultural initiatives. Clearly there is still much work to be done.

Equal opportunities work has shown that teachers see such supposedly 'political' issues as part of their own professional development. They have joined such courses with both their own careers in mind and those of their pupils. For teachers on the first course, the results of their participation led to new policies. Others used the course as a springboard to set up new single-sex personal and social education courses, school working parties, staff conferences etc. Such courses have in a very specific way brought together the desire to integrate concerns about social justice, with a heightened self knowledge about teaching practice, an awareness of the personal and professional dimensions of anti-sexist work, and a critical analysis of the role of schooling in society. With such complexity in mind, such courses offer the possibility of more realistic and sensitive policies for social equality.

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